



"It shall be done," said Siegfried. (See page 86.)

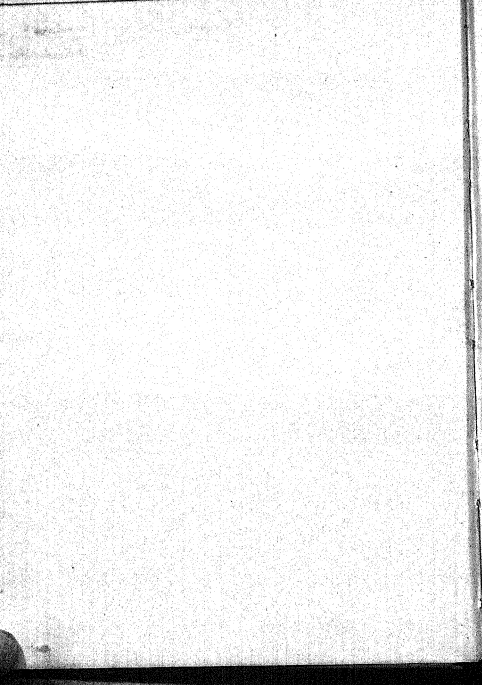
THE ROYAL TREASURY *Alnabek*
OF STORY AND SONG

Part III.
THE
HALL OF HEROES



THOMAS NELSON AND SONS
London, Edinburgh, Dublin, & New York

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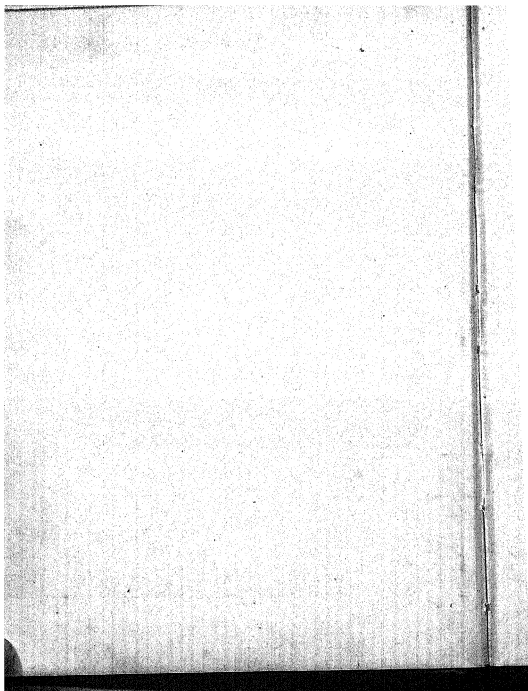
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THE ROYAL TREASURY.—III.

Part I.—TALES IN PROSE.

THE STORY OF THE GOLDEN FLEECE.

I.—The Boyhood of Jason.

IN days of old there lived a king named Pelias, who ruled over the wealthy city of Iolcos by the sea. Pelias was not the rightful king of this city, for the throne belonged to his step-brother Æson, from whom he had taken it by force.

Now Æson had a little son named Jason, whom he had sent away from home when he lost his throne and kingdom. The boy was taken by a slave into a great forest, where he was given into the charge of a strange being named Chiron.

This Chiron was one of the oldest and the wisest of all created things. Down to the waist



he was shaped like a man, but the rest of his body was like that of a horse. He had snowy locks and beard, and a broad brown chest. His eyes were mild and full of gentle wisdom, and his forehead was lofty and upright like a mountain wall.

He taught the boy Jason many things that a man and a hero ought to know—how to forge arrow-heads of iron; how to make arrows from reeds, and wing them with feathers; how to hunt the wild boar and the gentle hart in the great forest in which they had their home.

He also taught the boy how to play the lyre. And in time so well could Jason play, that he could readily gather round him the elf-maidens and other timid forest folk, and even make the hunter pause in the hottest of the chase to listen to the sweet sound of his lyre.

In due time Jason grew up into a strong and hardy youth, well fitted for the hunt and for all manly exercise. And one night there appeared before him the Moon-goddess in all her shining beauty, who said to him,—

“Who art thou, youth? Thou seemest more fitted to lead a band of heroes than to spend thy days in hunting the beasts of the forest.”

“I am Jason,” said he simply, “and I long for good days and peace, and the love of a gentle



maiden. Let the great kings send out their sons to lead the hero bands."

"Say to Chiron," she said, "that the time is come for thee to claim thine own. Ask him to tell thee the story of thy birth; and then go to the city of Iolcos, and take the good and the ill that fortune sends thee."

Jason did as the goddess bade him, and was told by Chiron the story of his father's loss, and the evil deeds of Pelias the king. And two days later he made ready to set out for the city of Iolcos.

Sad at heart, he said good-bye to Chiron. Then with his sword upon his thigh, and two stout hunting-spears in his right hand, he stepped forth across the sunny sward that lay before the cave which had been his home since his early boyhood.



II.—Jason comes to Iolcos.

Lightly he passed through the well-known woods, and came at last to the bank of a river. There he found the stream swollen so high that he could not hope to ford it.

"Rejoice, fair youth," said a voice near his elbow, and turning quickly round Jason saw at his side a frail old woman.

"Why should I rejoice?" asked he.



"Because I am near to help thee," was the reply.

"I fear I need more help than thine," said the youth. But in a moment the old woman took him up in her arms, and stepping into the rushing water, carried him with ease to the farther bank, on which she placed him.

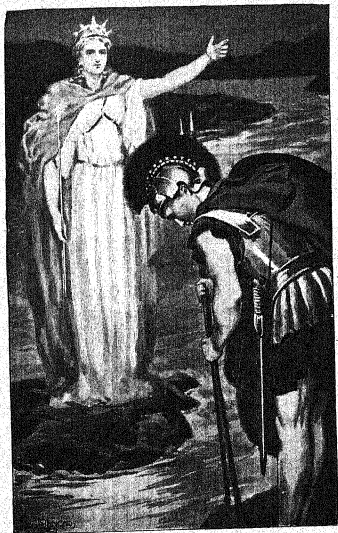
When Jason turned to speak to her, he saw in her place a noble lady dressed in a pure white robe, and bearing in her hand a jewelled rod.

"Jason," she said, as he bowed low before her, "I am the queen of gods and men; and as I have been to thee to-day, so will I ever be."

Then a rosy cloud wrapped itself round her, and she vanished in a moment from his sight.

Now as Jason had been borne across the stream he had lost the shoe from his right foot. And when he came at last to Iolcos the people in the market-place mocked at the half-shod stranger. But he paid no heed to them, and before long came before King Pelias. Of such commanding height was he that he stood head and shoulders above the rest of the throng at the foot of the monarch's ivory throne.

When the king saw the half-shod stranger he turned pale with fear; for he knew by this sign who this youth was, and how insecure would now be his hold upon his kingdom. But he made up



A noble lady dressed in a pure white robe.

his mind to use craft in this his hour of danger, and with a false smile upon his face he said,—

"Thou hast come in good time, my nephew Jason, for I would willingly now lay down the burden of this kingdom. But give me a short space to set things in order; and for to-day come with me to the banquet-hall, where I will feast thee as becomes the son of a king."

So Jason feasted at the king's table; and while they sat at meat the crafty king told to his guests the story of the Golden Fleece.

"Long years ago," he said, "there lived a king who had a son and daughter, with whom he lived very happily. But when his queen died, and he took another wife, these happy days came to an end. For the new queen made the lives of the young prince and princess so bitter that they often wished that they might die.

"Then there came one day into the garden of the king's palace a wonderful winged ram with a fleece of gold; and upon its back it bore the young prince and princess up into the air and towards the eastern sea. In time it came to the sea-passage which parts Europe from Asia; but as it flew across, the princess slipped and fell from its back into the water, and she was drowned before the eyes of her beloved brother.

"On went the ram until it came to the court



of a king who treated the young prince with great kindness. There the youth stayed for some time, and, being brave and strong, won great renown in fighting for this king. In his home he kept the fleece of the ram, which had been killed as a sacrifice; but in time the king became envious, and longed to possess the treasure for himself. So he caused some of his men to murder the prince, and then placed the Golden Fleece within a temple in a sacred grove, where it is now guarded by a sleepless dragon.

"Now the murdered prince was my father's brother. And night after night his spirit visits me, begging that I will send some brave hero to bring away the Golden Fleece."

The king ended, and the tears stood in his eyes.

Jason sat looking at him while the rich blood rose and flushed his manly cheek. He clenched his hand about the stem of his wine-cup as though it were the hilt of a sword. The king watched him with crafty eyes.

"Is not Jason the man who will bring me relief?" he cried, and the eyes of the young man flashed. "Will *he* not lead a chosen band of warriors on the quest of the Golden Fleece?"

A whisper ran round the banquet table—"Jason! Jason!" And rising to his feet, the

young hero gave the promise for which the wily king had schemed. For already many brave men had lost their lives in the quest, and it was the earnest wish of King Pelias that Jason should do the same.

III.—The Voyage of the "Argo."

Then there went out a number of heralds into all the lands round about. They carried to the princes of those lands the news that Jason meant to go in search of the Golden Fleece, and invited all who would to join him.

Many princes came at the call, eager to join in the quest, for the thought of danger was to them as the smell of the sea to the hardy mariner. Foremost among them was the mighty Hercules, the hero of many a fight, clad in the skin of a fierce lion he had slain, and carrying his huge club bound round with brass. And along with him came some of the bravest men in the land, whose names were known far and near for their deeds of daring.

"Never was seen such a meeting of heroes," said the men of Iolcos when they saw them gathered together. But the women shook their heads sadly, and said, "They go to their death!"

The first thing to be done was to build a ship in which they might pass over the dark waters

to the land of the Golden Fleece. Now among the heroes was one named Argus, who had won great fame as a builder of ships; and under his guidance the work was begun.

Loud rang the axes on the trunks of the lofty pines in a forest not far from the city. Soon were heard the clang of the hammers and the voices of the builders as they reared aloft the mighty vessel. It was the largest ever yet built, and was to be rowed with fifty oars—one for each hero of the band. In a short space of time the vessel was ready, and they named her the *Argo*, after the man who had planned her.

When this had been done, Jason went in search of a friend whom he longed to have by his side in the dangerous voyage across the sea. This was Orpheus, the most skilful of musicians, who by the sweetness of his harp and voice could not only charm the spirits of mortals, but could overcome the wild nature of the beasts of the field.

At the call of his friend he came, though he was weary with many wanderings. Then they stored the *Argo* with food and water. Each man took his oar in his hands, and sitting well in order, they smote the sounding waters, urged on by the music of Orpheus, who sang this song to the sea:—



"O bitter sea, tumultuous sea,
Full many an ill is wrought by thee
* * * * *
So, if thou hast a mind to slay,
Fair prize thou hast of us to-day;
And if thou hast a mind to save,
Great praise and honour shalt thou have:
But whatso thou wilt do with us
Our end shall not be piteous,
Because our memories shall live
When folk forget the way to drive
The black keel through the heaped-up sea,
And half dried up thy waters be."

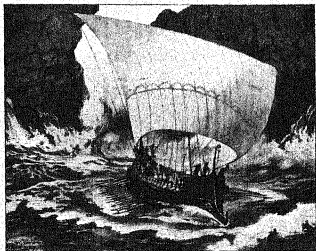
Then at the words of the singer the heroes drove the good ship forward, so that the sea-birds screaming above her scarcely flew as fast as she.

IV.—Jason meets the Princess Medea.

We cannot tell here of the many dangers and perils through which the heroes passed before they came to the land of Colchis, where Jason knew he should find the Golden Fleece.

At one time they had to pass among some rocks known as the Clashing Islands, because they moved about in the water and knocked against each other. Many a good ship had been caught between them, and crushed into a shapeless mass,

When the heroes saw them in the distance rising out of the water, their hearts sank within them. As they drew near they saw the Clashing Islands heaving and grinding together so that the sound went up to the heavens. There were some among the voyagers whose hearts quailed



The "Argo" passed between them. (See page 18.)

with fear, and they were upon the point of turning the vessel. But Jason, their brave leader, was not one of these.

"Shall this be the ending of our quest?" he cried aloud. "And shall we find the worst who sought the best?" Then he called to one of

the heroes to bring him a caged dove which a certain king had given to him in return for service rendered.

"Stand upon the prow," he cried, "and let the bird slip from your hand." This was done. Upward soared the dove, winging its flight between the clashing rocks.

As it passed through, the mighty rocks ground together with a noise of thunder, but they only caught a feather from the bird's tail. Then they rebounded; and as they flew apart the *Argo* passed between them, driven by the strong strokes of the fifty oars, and came out unharmed on the other side.

After long buffeting with wind and wave, they came at last to the shores of the land of Colchis. Weary they were when they landed, but Jason at once sought out the king in whose keeping was the Golden Fleece.

To him he told the purpose of his journey. The wily monarch looked at him. "Dost thou know what thou seekest?" he asked. "It is certain death for thee." Then he sent a messenger to bring to him his daughter Medea; and Jason stood silent before him, wondering what would come of this.

Before long, Medea entered the marble hall with a band of lovely maidens round about her.



Medea entered the marble hall

But beautiful as they were, the princess, their mistress, was still more beautiful. "My father and good lord," she said, and her voice was like a silver bell, "what is it thou dost ask of me?"

"Tell this youth," said the king, "what great deeds he must do before he can win the Golden Fleece."

Then she turned her head, and looked the young hero full in the eyes. "Prince," she said, "these hard things thou must do. First, go to the ox-stall and bring out the two fierce brazen bulls that my father feeds on food which nourishes fire. Heed not what they may do, but yoke them to the plough which hangs in their stall. Then drive them, if thou canst, through the field known as the Acre of the God of War.

"When that has been done, take the sack that holds the serpents' teeth and sow them as seed in the turned-up soil. Wait, then, till the dreadful crop which shall spring from that seed has grown, and reap it if thou hast no fear of death. If after that thou still dost live, I will give thee the seven keys of the temple in which hangs the Golden Fleece.

"But even then thy song of triumph must remain unsung. For the guardian of the Fleece is a fork-tongued dragon against whose scaly

hide thy steel shall smite in vain. If thou canst fight with him, or by any art canst overcome him, the Fleece is thine. But ponder well, and ask thyself whether indeed it were not better to return to thy home in peace."

As the princess spoke her eyes grew moist, for her heart was filled with pity for the youth who had come to Colchis and to his death. And as she looked at him she loved him as she had never yet loved any man.

"Thou singest a bitter song to a most sweet tune, fair maiden," said Jason. "But doubt not that when to-morrow dawns I will go with a glad heart to meet this certain death of thine."

V.—*The Brazen Bulls.*

Now Medea had magic powers, and she spent the night in planning how she could help the hero whom she loved. Early the next morning she went to him and gave him a small phial containing a liquid, with which she told him to anoint his arms and body. In this way, she said, he would make himself proof against the fiery breath of the brazen bulls.

Then she gave him also a crystal ball. "When from the seed of serpents' teeth," she said, "a crop of armed men shall spring to life, cast this among them; and as soon as it falls to earth





thou shalt see them turn and fight among themselves till all are laid lifeless upon the ground.

"At the banquet to-night," she went on, "be temperate, and bid thy men forbear the maddening wine. Then I will bring to thee in secret the keys of the Temple of the Fleece, and the golden prize shall be thine own. But as for me," she added sadly, "when the *Argo* has sailed away I shall be left to bear the vengeance of the king."

"Not so," said Jason readily. "May I suffer endless torment if I turn back to my ship and leave thee here alone."

Next day the trumpets sounded, and all the people trooped forth to see the hero yoke the brazen bulls and fight with the earth-born warriors. Jason had prepared himself for the hard task as Medea had taught him; but in spite of that, it took all the courage of his stout heart to face the fire-breathing bulls.

Calmly he led them forth and yoked them to the plough. Neither did all their bellowing and plunging, nor even their fiery breath, strike any terror to his heart. Then, single-handed, he ploughed the acre of land, and sowed the seed of dragons' teeth. Up sprang a crop of armed men, and Jason gripped his sword and faced them boldly. But after a stern fight he saw

that he must soon be thrown to the earth ; and taking the crystal ball which he had hung round his neck, he cast it unseen among his foes.

At once, as Medea had foretold, they fell to fighting among themselves, and one by one they were struck to the earth from whence they came. Then Jason cried in a mocking tone to the king, who had come to watch the fight, "These are wonderful guards of thine, O king, who keep the Golden Fleece against all comers. Now bring me the keys without delay, that I may go at once to see the object of my journey."

"There is no haste surely, dear guest," said the king. "Well hast thou fought, and without further trial thou shalt go to-morrow to thy ship laden with the Golden Fleece, and cheered upon thy way by the shouts of my people."

Then Jason thanked the king for his friendly words, though he put no real trust in them. But he sent a message to his companions, telling them to drink little of the wine at the banquet that night, and when the feast was over to go down to the quay where the *Argo* lay. There they were to await his coming, with the prow of the vessel turned towards the open sea.

He meant to go himself and secure the Fleece while they waited, ready to put off as soon as he should be on board the vessel. And he told



his followers that if he should lose his life in the attempt, they were to leave the country at once, and seek again their homes across the sea.

That night the king feasted the heroes with the richest foods his palace could afford; and with a pleasant smile he urged them, one and all, to drain the wine-cup and forget their toilsome voyage across the stormy seas. But they all sat speaking little, nor did they drink deeply of the wine. At last the king gave the signal, and the guests departed each to his own couch. Soon the whole of the palace seemed hushed in quiet slumber.

Then Medea arose and went to fetch the keys of the Temple of the Fleece, which were kept in a deep cellar beneath the palace. Clad in gray garments, she moved like a shadow along the stone passages until she came to an iron door all red with rust.

Having lighted a small lamp which she bore in her hand, she opened this door with a key of brass, and soon stood within a small chamber, in the wall of which was a cupboard. Then she drew a tiny twig from her bosom and pressed it upon the lock, at the same time saying a few words in a low voice.

At once the door of the cupboard flew open and showed a golden urn, into which Medea put



The door of the cupboard flew open.

her hand and took out a bunch of seven keys. Then, after fastening the door of the chamber once again, she went back to the room where Jason awaited her, all armed and ready.

Without a word she made a sign for him to follow her. And the two passed through one after another of the palace doors, which they left open behind them in order that Jason's companions might be able to make their escape. ✓

VI.—The Guardian of the Temple.

So the lovers passed out in silence into the dewy night. But neither spoke a word until they reached the gateway of the Temple of the Fleece. Then Medea, turning, said, "Look! Yonder thou canst see armed shadows steal down to the quay. Now follow me, and speak not a single word unless I bid thee, or our lives may pay the forfeit."

Then she went onward to the brazen door of the temple, which bore no lock; for the guardian of the place made it more secure than all the locks, bolts, and bars that were ever forged. Peeping within the half-open door, Jason saw the dragon lying prone upon the marble floor.

Hideous it was in truth—dark-skinned, spotted, with short rusty hair about its neck. Its claws were hooked and yellow, and its ugly face was



set in mockery of a smile. Jason, for all his courage, felt his heart quail at the sight.

But without the least outward sign of fear Medea stepped forward, bearing in her hand a silver harp, which Jason now saw she had fastened round her neck with a golden chain. At the sight of her the great dragon raised itself upon its feet as if to meet her; and she began to play so sweetly that Jason thought he had never heard such music in all his days.

Slowly the dragon drew near to the lovers as they stood side by side, and Medea whispered breathlessly, "Mine is the blame if we perish here together. If I give the word, draw thy sword and die like a man in battle with the monster."

Meanwhile the music grew sweeter and sweeter, and the great beast began to move round and round them. As it moved Medea turned, so that her eyes were always fixed upon its face. Then at last she broke into a song which filled the temple with a sound even sweeter than the music of the harp.

Round and round went the beast, drawing nearer and nearer to the lovers. And still Medea's voice rose clear and sweet, though she trembled in every limb. Then at last the dragon sank down as if in a deep sleep at the foot of the fair singer.



With a shudder that ran through her whole body, she placed her white foot upon the dragon's wrinkled neck, and whispered to her companion, "The keys! Haste, oh, haste! Yonder is the shrine where the silver lamp burns clearly. Haste, oh, haste!"

Then Jason stepped lightly from her side and went towards the place to which Medea had pointed. The shrine stood in the midst of the temple, raised on pillars of jasper and marble. The first door was of silver, and this he readily opened with the smallest of the keys. Then came five other doors, each of which he opened in turn. At last he reached the innermost, which was of hammered iron; but before he placed the key in the lock he paused for a moment.

"May all indeed be well," he said, "and may the winning of the prize bring happy days."

VII.—The Winning of the Fleece.

Thereupon he threw open the last door, and closing his eyes to hide the dazzling radiance of the Golden Fleece, he plunged his hands into it and carried it towards the place where Medea stood.

Then the maiden hastily drew her tired foot from the head of the dragon, though she did not cease to make sweet music on her silver harp.



When Jason drew near to her she flung her outer mantle over the Fleece, and whispered,—

“Make all haste. He sleeps who never slept by night or day till now. But his sleep will not last long. Haste thee, oh, haste; nor ever look behind.”

Then with swift foot they left the temple, and reached the open air in safety. On they went with anxious hearts till they came to the quay, and saw at last the painted sides of the *Argo*.

Swiftly they stepped on board, and Jason, kneeling, whispered a few words to the rowers on their benches. Then Medea saw men rise from the decks like gray shadows, and take from their leader's hands the longed-for Fleece for which they had so stoutly faced death and danger.

In a few moments Medea was placed in a corner on the deck. But still her heart beat loudly with anxious fear.

“Haste, ye heroes,” she said softly, “to sea! to sea! Soon ye shall see the warning beacons flare, and the chase will be hot and furious. Moreover, farther down this stream waits my brother in a well-manned vessel ready for battle.”

Even as she spoke the long oars dipped into the water, the loosened sail swelled out before

the wind, and the stout ship passed down the stream towards the open sea. But as she moved forward the heroes saw the warning watch-fire flare to heaven. Then there arose loud cries of alarm within the city, and the sound of horns rang out from tower to tower.

But the stout ship *Argo*, leaping forward to the swing of the oars, swept onward like a thing of life. No longer did the heroes keep silence. For when their eyes fell upon the golden reward of all their toils, their shouts of triumph rang out across the water. And Orpheus, with lyre in hand, sang a song sweeter than any he had ever sung before—a song of home and peaceful toil:—

“O surely, now the fisherman
Draws homeward through the water wan,
Across the bay we know so well,
And in the sheltered chalky dell
The shepherd stirs; and now afield
They drive the team with white wand peeled,
Muttering across the barley-bread
At daily toil and dreary head.”

Then he went on to tell of the coming meeting with a maiden whom he loved above all others. And as he sang he seemed to put into words the thoughts of his companions.



Orpheus sang a song.

"Ah, one day landing from the sea,
Amid the maidens shall I hear
Her voice in praise, and see her near,
Holding the gold-wrapt laurel crown,
Midst of the shouting, wandering town."

So the *Argo* escaped her pursuers and came at last to Iolcos; but how Jason won his kingdom, and what manner of life he lived after his quest, is too long a tale to be told here.

Told from WILLIAM MORRIS'S "Jason."

THE MONSTER IN THE MAZE.

I.—The Sword and Sandals.

LONG, long ago there lived in the far-away land of Greece a brave boy whose name was Theseus. His father he had never seen, for he was the king of a city far away from the boy's home; and his mother, who was also the daughter of a king, spent a sad and lonely life, cheered only by the presence of her little son.

One day she took Theseus into a dark wood, on the border of which stood a temple. After walking for some distance she stopped and said, "Theseus, go farther into the wood till you come to a great stone lying flat at the foot of a tree.



Lift up the stone, take what you find underneath it, and bring it to me."

Theseus went forward, full of wonder, and soon found the stone, though it was covered with ivy and undergrowth of the wood. But when he tried to raise it he found that he was not strong enough. Over and over again he tried, until the sweat ran down his flushed face. But it was of no use, and he was forced to return to his mother. "No man in all the land could raise such a stone," he said, with anger in his eye at his own failure.

Sadly his mother took him by the hand and led him away. "Let it stay until another year has gone by," she said, "and then you shall try again."

When a year had passed, mother and son came again to the sacred grove; but even then Theseus could not raise the stone. His mother led him away once more, saying gently that he should try again at the end of a second year.

But when the time came round Theseus could not lift the stone, nor yet at the end of a third year. By this time the boy was filled with a great desire to know what lay beneath the stone; and he had quite made up his mind to strengthen himself by manly exercise, so that he should one day be able to satisfy his desire.

This he did; and when he was verging on

manhood he went once more into the grove. At his first effort the stone moved. Then putting forth his whole strength he raised it and rolled it over.

In a hollow of the earth beneath it lay a sword and a pair of sandals. The former had a hilt of gold, and the latter were made of the same precious metal. Taking the sword in one hand and the sandals in the other, he ran to meet his mother.

But when she saw him she hid her face in her robe and wept bitterly. Theseus waited in wonder until his mother once more raised her tear-stained face. Then she said, "Come with me, my son, to the top of the rock, whence we can behold the sea."

So they walked on a little till they came to the high rock, at the foot of which lay the bright blue waters. "Do you see this land at our feet?" she said.

"Yes," was the answer; "it is the land of my birth and boyhood." For Theseus spoke now as a man, having, as he thought, proved his manhood to the full.

Then his mother said, "Do you see also that land on the far horizon?"

"Yes," said the young man, looking towards the place to which his mother pointed.





"Come with me, my son, to the top of the rock."

"It is a fair land and large," said she, "set round with lofty mountains; amid which lies Athens, the noblest of the cities of Greece. What would you do, Theseus, if you were king in that fair city?"

"I would rule in wisdom," said the youth, "and seek the good of my people."

Then his mother's eyes grew brighter, and she said, "Take this sword and these sandals,

and lay them before the king of that city. Then say to him, 'The stone is lifted; but whose is the pledge beneath it?'"

Thereupon she kissed her son again and again, with many sad and bitter tears of parting. Then, turning, she went into the temple, leaving the youth without.

II.—The Wild Man of the Mountain.

Theseus at once got ready for his journey, and before setting out went to consult the king, his grandfather. "Go not by the path through the mountain," said the old man, "for perils of robbers and floods lurk there. Take rather to the sea, and cross in safety from shore to shore." But the mention of perils by land nerved the heart of the young hero, and he made up his mind to brave them all.

We cannot tell here of all the dangers which beset him on his way, but two of his adventures we will describe.

On the first day of his journey he came to a dreary plain, on which lived a fierce savage who went about armed with a club of iron, and spread terror among all the people round about. Theseus walked onward boldly, until he saw the man sitting on a stone by the roadside.

Of a truth his appearance was enough to strike terror to the heart of the bravest. He wore a cloak made from the skin of a bear, from which the head had not been removed, but served as a kind of cap for the wearer. His eyes were fierce and bloodshot, and his teeth were like those of a snarling wolf.

"Come hither," he cried, as Theseus drew near, "and let me feast upon you. For you there is now no way of escape."

"What is your name?" asked Theseus steadily, though his heart beat fiercely in his breast.

"I am called the Club-bearer," was the reply; "and this iron club was forged by Vulcan, who has his workshop at the bottom of a mountain of fire. Give me your sword and your sandals, or your life shall pay the forfeit."

Then Theseus, wrapping his mantle about his left arm to serve as a shield, drew his sword and rushed upon his enemy. The iron club fell again and again, but Theseus warded off the blows with his arm. Yet try as he would he could not pierce the savage with his sword.

At last, losing patience, he closed with him, and the two rolled over, wrapped in a close embrace. Then with a mighty effort Theseus shook himself free and stood up, leaving the



Club-bearer lying dead upon the ground. So the land was freed from the cruel monster, and the shepherd's pipe was once more heard on the wide, open plain and among the quiet valleys.

III.—The Stretcher.



After many further adventures and victories, won by strength and stoutness of heart, Theseus came to a vale at the foot of a steep mountain, where he met a tall man dressed in rich clothing. On his arms were golden bracelets, and round his neck a collar of jewels; and he came forward with a pleasant smile and outstretched hands.

"Welcome to these mountains, fair youth," he said. "Happy am I to have met you! What greater pleasure can a good man have than the company of pleasant strangers? But I see that you are weary. Come up to my castle and rest yourself for a time."

"I give you thanks," said Theseus, "but I am unable to tarry upon my way."

"But you cannot reach any place of rest before nightfall," said the man. "My castle is the last place of call for many a weary mile. It is well for me that I have met you, for my greatest joy is to meet with travellers, and hear from them tales of foreign lands."

"Come with me and eat the best of venison, and drink the rich red wine, and sleep upon my famous bed, of which all travellers say they never saw the like; for whether my guest is tall or short that bed fits him to a hair, and he sleeps upon it as he never slept before."

Theseus wished to press onward, but he was ashamed to seem rude to so pleasant a man, and he was curious to see the wonderful bed. Yet somehow he shrank from the man; for though his voice was gentle, it was dry and husky like a toad's; and though his eyes were mild, they were dull and cold like stones. But at last Theseus consented to go, and the two went on together to the castle, which stood on a bleak, wind-swept spot, high up above a bare and rocky hillside.

As they drew near to the gate, the host saw on the path beneath them a number of merchants on their way through the country, with pack-asses laden with merchandise. "Ah," cried he, "we must invite these men also to share our meat. Wait until I return." With that he walked quickly away, leaving Theseus to climb the steep pathway to the castle by himself.

As the young man walked slowly onward he met an old man who had been gathering fagots for his fire. "Help me, fair youth," cried the

stranger, "for my limbs are stiff and weak with age."

At once Theseus lifted the burden on his back, and the old man thanked him and said, "Who are you, my young friend, and wherefore do you travel on this weary way?"

"I am going to the castle yonder," said Theseus, "for the lord of the place has promised to entertain me, and to let me sleep on his famous bed."

"Alas," said the old man, "you are going to torment and to death, for the master of the castle is a robber and a murderer. As for his bed, truly it fits all-comers, but no one ever rose alive from it except myself."

"Why?" cried Theseus in great surprise.

"Because if a man be too tall for it, he lops off his limbs till they be short enough; and if he be too short, his legs are stretched till they be long enough; but me only he was forced to spare seven weary years ago, for I alone fitted his bed exactly. Then he made me his slave, and now I hew wood and draw water for him, I who was once a wealthy merchant in a fair city beyond the sea."

Theseus said nothing, but he ground his teeth together.

"Escape while you can," said the old man.



"The monster is called Procrustes—that is to say, the Stretcher, a name of evil report. Yesterday he caused the death of a young man and a lovely maid. Fly while there is yet time."

"There is no need to fly," said Theseus stoutly, and he turned to go back down the mountain side. In a short time he met Procrustes coming up the path, and the merchants with him, smiling and talking gaily. When he saw Theseus the host cried out, "Ah, fair young guest, have I kept you waiting too long?"

But Theseus answered, "The man who stretches his guests upon a bed, and hews off

their feet, what shall be his lot when right is done throughout the land?"

Then the face of Procrustes grew as black as night, and he felt for his sword in haste. But Theseus leapt upon him, and clasped him round waist and elbow, so that he could not draw the blade which hung by his left side. "Is this tale true, my host," cried Theseus, "or is it false?" But Procrustes answered never a word.

Then Theseus flung the monster from him, and with a stroke of his sword laid him dead at his feet. Then going up to the castle he found there great wealth, which he parted among the people of the country. This done, he went once more upon his way, keeping nothing for himself.

IV.—Theseus comes to Athens.

After many adventures, Theseus came at last to the great city of Athens, where he was hailed as a hero; for his fame had run before him like a swift-footed herald before a king.

But he did not stay to hear the praises of the market-place. At once he sought out the palace of the king, where he found a band of greedy courtiers feasting and making merry in the banquet-hall. But the king was not among them.

"Go, tell your master," said Theseus to a royal servant, "that I beg audience of him."

And when the king came into the hall, weak and aged as he was, the heart of Theseus went out to him, and he bowed himself low at his feet.

Now the king loved him as he looked upon him, but his eyes filled with tears as he said, "It is little that I can give you, my noble boy, and nothing that is worthy of you."

"All I ask," said Theseus, "is to eat and drink at your table."

"That I can grant," said the king; "if, indeed, I am master here," he added, as though he doubted the matter.

Then at the king's command Theseus sat down to eat and drink, but he kept his club by his side. Meanwhile the queen, who was the real ruler of the kingdom, kept her eyes fixed upon the young stranger. "He will be master here," she said, and taking a cup she secretly placed some poison in it, filled it with wine, and sent it to the stranger.

Theseus rose to his feet. "The queen does me too great an honour," he said. "Let her first drink of the cup, that the wine may be sweeter from her lips."

Then the wicked queen turned pale and stammered, "Forgive me, fair sir, but I am ill, and dare not drink any wine."



"Thou shalt pledge me in that cup, or die," said Theseus, raising aloft his ponderous club.

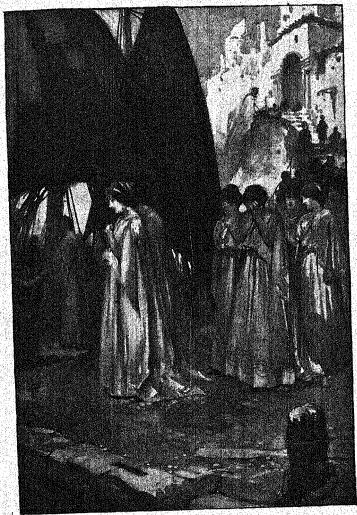
With a shriek the queen sprang from her place, hurried from the palace, and was never seen again, to the great joy of the kingdom; for she was a wicked sorceress, in whose hands the king was weak and yielding.

Then Theseus went up to the king, drew from his bosom the sword and sandals, and delivered the message of his mother. The king turned pale for a moment, and then cast himself weeping upon the young man's neck. "My son! my son!" he cried, while the tears ran down his aged cheeks.

The sight roused the jealousy of the courtiers, and they took down from the walls the swords and lances which adorned the hall. Then they advanced in a body upon the young stranger, in whom they plainly saw an enemy.

One hurled a lance, which barely missed the young man's head. Then Theseus rushed forward, and the fight began; and though they were twenty to one, the young hero beat them all. Some he slew, and the rest he put to flight. And when the people of the city heard what had happened, there was great rejoicing that the king had at last found a worthy helper.

But still the king sat in his palace sad at



The ship with the black sail came to the island. (See page 47.)

heart, as though a heavy shadow lay upon him. One day a herald came to the city, and standing in the market-place cried aloud : " O king and people of Athens, where is your yearly tribute ? "

The words seemed to strike terror to the hearts of all who listened. And Theseus having asked the meaning of this strange thing, was told the following story.

Long before, Minos, the king of the island of Crete, had won from the king of Athens a promise that seven youths and seven maidens should be sent to him from the city every year. This was because the son of Minos had met with his death at Athens in some strange way.

These young men and maidens, when they came to Crete, were placed in a maze, from which there was no escape, to be devoured by the Minotaur, a fearful monster that fed on human flesh.

When Theseus heard the tale his face flushed with eagerness, and he said, " I will go with them, and slay this monster. " Then the king, his father, clung to him and begged him not to go. But the hero's heart was set on this enterprise ; and when the seven youths and maidens had been chosen by lot, he took his seat with them in the black-sailed vessel which was bound for the island kingdom of Crete.



"Fear not, my father," said the heroic prince, "for I will come again, and bring with me these youths and maidens. Let a watch be set on the wind-swept cliff high above the sea. And, if all is well, on our return we will hoist a white sail as a token of joy to your watchers."

V.—Theseus and the Princess.

In due time the ship with the black sail came to the island of Crete. And, having landed, the youths and maidens, with Theseus at their head, sought out King Minos in his marble hall.

Then the monarch told his guards to bind them at once, and to cast them one by one to the monster in the maze, that their lives might help to pay for the life of his well-loved son. But Theseus cried,—

"A boon, O king! Let me first be cast to the monster. For that purpose I came hither of my own free will."

"Who art thou, then, brave youth?" asked the monarch.

"I am the son of the king who reigns in Athens," said the hero; and the heart of Minos was touched.

"Go in peace, brave lad," he said gently. "It is a pity that one so valiant should die this cruel death."



But Theseus answered, "Not so, O king! I will not go back to my father's hall until I have seen this monster face to face."

Then Minos gave orders for the prisoners to be removed, thinking Theseus little better than a madman. But when night had fallen there came to the door of the prison in which the hero was lying Ariadne, the youthful daughter of the king. For when Theseus had spoken to her father she had marked his brave bearing and manly spirit, and had learnt in that short space to love him with all her heart. /

"Go down to your ship at once, brave youth," she cried, "for I have spoken to the guards before the door. Take your friends with you, and go back in peace to your aged father; and take me with you, for I dare not face the king, my father, after you are gone."

Then Theseus remained for a moment dumb with surprise and with admiration for the lovely maid who stood beside him. At last he found his voice, and said, "I cannot go home in peace till I have met and slain the monster in the maze."

"Fair youth," she said, "you are too bold for the peace of mind of any maiden who loves you. Yet if you will persist in your dangerous task, I can help you; for I can give you a sword



He went through arches and galleries. (See page 50.)

against which the monster is not proof, and a clue of thread by means of which you can find your way out of the maze after you have slain him. But if you escape you must take me home with you, for my father will surely kill me when he learns what I have done."

Then Theseus hid the sword in his bosom and rolled up the thread in a ball. And he swore to be true to the maiden, and to take her with him when he had slain the beast and had come unharmed out of the maze, as he was quite confident he would shortly do.

When night was falling, the guards of King Minos came to the prison of Theseus and led him away to the maze. And he went down into that gloomy glen, through winding paths and galleries among the rocks, under caverns and arches and over heaps of fallen stones. As he went he saw quite plainly that he could never have hoped to find his way back unaided from this dreadful place.

But when he entered the place he had fastened his clue of thread to a stone; and now as he walked and stumbled onward towards the centre of the maze he let the thread unroll in his hand. Then when the whole of the thread was unrolled he suddenly came upon the dreaded monster of the maze of which he had heard so much.

VI.—The Death of the Monster.

Never before in all his strange adventures had Theseus met such a fearful creature. His body was that of a man, his head was that of a fierce bull, his teeth were those of a roaring lion; and when he caught sight of Theseus he set up a mighty roar, put his head to the ground, and ran at him with full speed.

The young hero stepped aside out of his path, and as he passed by wounded him in the knee. Now the place where they had met was a narrow passage between two mighty rocks, in which the monster was unable to turn and renew the attack. So Theseus followed him closely, taking care not to lose his hold of the clue of thread.

On they went, till at last the hero overtook his grisly foe, and laid him dead upon a lofty, overhanging rock. Then Theseus turned, still following the clue, and made his way with all speed out of that gloomy glen. And at the entrance to the maze he found the princess waiting for him.

"He is dead," whispered the hero. And without a word Ariadne went with him to the prison, where she set free the seven youths and maidens while the guards lay wrapped in the soundest of slumber; for the princess had given

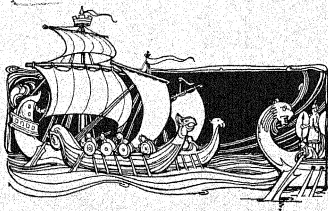


them wine, with which she had mixed a sleeping potion of great strength.

So the happy lovers and their companions escaped the fury of Minos. But in their joy at their deliverance they forgot to hoist the white sail as Theseus had promised his father to do.

Meanwhile the king kept constant watch in a tower upon a lofty cliff, eagerly scanning the wide waste of waters for a sign of the returning vessel. And one day he saw the ship in the distance, driven before the wind—but the sail was as black as night.

Mad with grief, the unhappy king hurled himself from the cliff, and so ended his life. And when Theseus landed there was none to welcome him. In the silent home of his father he wandered sadly, full of regret for his broken promise.



THE HEROIC HERCULES.

I.—The Child and the Serpents.

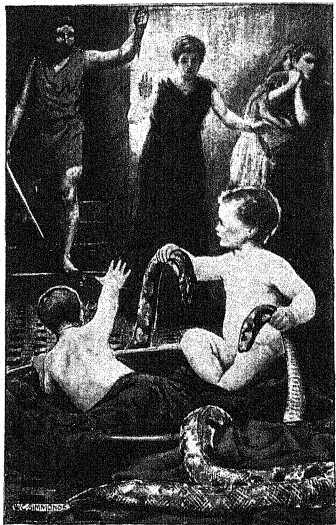
ONCE upon a time there lived in the famous land of Greece a brave warrior named Hercules. Even in his earliest boyhood he had shown that he was a stranger to fear, as the following story will prove.

One evening, when he was about a year old, his mother placed him with his baby brother in his father's upturned shield and rocked the boys to sleep. Then she went herself to her rest, and soon there was quiet in the house.

But while all were wrapt in happy slumber there came into the house from the garden two huge crawling snakes, holding high their heads in an angry manner. Slowly they crept towards the boys in the shield, while their eyes gleamed with a terrible light.

Just at that moment the younger child awoke, and, seeing the snakes not far away, raised a scream of fright which awoke his brother. Then the child Hercules grasped each of the snakes by the neck; and so firm was the grip of his fingers that they were not able to coil their bodies about him, as it was plain they meant to do.

The cry of the baby boy awoke the attendant



The mother came to the scene of terror.

maidens who slept by his mother's couch, and they came running to the cradle. Then the mother awoke also, and came with bare feet to the scene of terror. There she found her husband, sword in hand, ready to cope with any danger. But all their fears were calmed when they saw the serpents lying dead—strangled by the fingers of a child.

Hercules smiled and crowed again and again, as if in great glee at what he had done. Then the father raised the boy, wrapped him up warmly, and laid him down again to sleep. But the mother took the younger child and carried him away to her own couch for greater safety.

On the next day the mother of Hercules sought out a wise man and told him of what had happened in the dead of the night. Then the old man raised his sightless eyes, and said in a voice which seemed like a song,—

“Honoured among matrons shall be the mother of Hercules, for he shall become a hero of renown, a help to the oppressed and a scourge to the oppressor. Mighty works shall he do, such as no other has yet performed in Greece; and at the end he shall be given a place of honour among the highest.”

Then the boy Hercules was taken and trained with care, that he might do and know all that

is fitting for a warrior. And he slept each night by the side of his father beneath a covering of a lion's hide.

II.—How Hercules cleaned a Stable.

We have not space to tell here of how Hercules, when he grew up, fought with and slew a fierce lion and took its shaggy skin for a mantle; nor yet to tell how he slew a monster which had nine heads, and a great wild boar which he chased for many a mile; but we shall tell how he cleaned a stable!

The stable belonged to a king who owned more cattle and sheep than any one else in the world, as well as wide-spreading pastures on which to feed them. Now there came a certain man to Hercules who dared him to undertake the hard task of cleaning out in one day the great stable in which all the cattle and sheep owned by this shepherd-king were kept at night.

The challenge was enough for the hero. He gave his word that he would perform the task; and shouldering his club, he set out, dressed in his mantle of the lion's hide. He travelled many a mile over plain and hill before he reached the pastures of the shepherd-king. Near the end of this long journey he fell in with an old man who was busily working by the roadside,



and he asked him whether he could find any one who would take him to the king.

The old man rested from his work for a while, and said, "Yonder comes my royal master with his son the prince. Go forward and join him." This Hercules did at once, and was kindly greeted by the monarch and his son. But they were too busy for the moment even to ask Hercules what had brought him to their country, and the hero stood by them while they directed the shepherds at their evening work; for the sun was now throwing its level rays over the broad green pastures.

Across the wide plain came the great herds of cattle and flocks of sheep, slowly making their way towards the stable. They were met by a small army of herdsmen, who were soon busy milking the cows and driving the animals into their shelter for the night. The shepherd-king and his son walked in and out among them, noting how each man did his work; and Hercules went with them, wondering, as he walked, at the number and the excellence of the sheep and cattle.

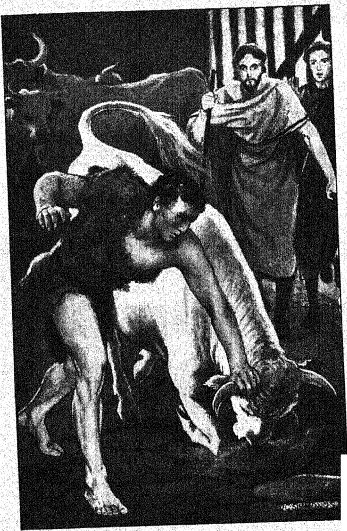
In one stable he saw twelve white bulls, which he examined with special care, for they were finer, nobler, and fiercer than any he had ever seen. These were the guardians of the king's

cattle, and they drove away the fierce wild beasts which often came prowling about the folds.

As Hercules walked behind them the leader turned its head to look at him; and when it saw the lion's head upon his shoulder the bull made a rush at him, thinking, doubtless, that here was an enemy which might do harm to the flocks. Quick as thought the hero stepped aside, and as the bull rushed past him, he caught one of its horns in his left hand and forced it to its knees. Then the king and his son came up, and the bull was tethered for safety; and they were full of wonder at the strength of a man who could do such a deed as this.

Then Hercules offered, in return for a share of the king's wealth, to clean out his great stable in one day. The shepherd-king smiled at the request, for he felt quite sure that no man, however strong and willing he might be, could do in one day a piece of work which would take a hundred men several days to perform. So he promised a large reward in cattle and sheep if the work should be done in a single day.

The next morning Hercules went to the stone wall which was built round the stable and made a wide breach in it, flinging the stones to left and right, and working with such fury that the



He caught one of its horns.

king was greatly surprised. Then he took a spade, and in a few hours had made a deep trench from this hole in the wall to the bank of the river which flowed not far away.

Next he caused the water of the river to flow through this canal, and then through the stable of the king. So cleverly had he planned the work that the water, after running through the stable, made its way down a slope into the channel of the river at a point lower down in its course.

When the water had been running for some hours Hercules once more stopped up the channel, and placed the stones of the wall in position. Then, having done the work according to his promise, he went to claim his wages.

But meanwhile the shepherd-king had learned from some of his herdsmen who the stranger was, and that he was doing the work because a certain man had dared him to do it. So, thinking that Hercules would have cleaned out the stable even if he had not been promised a reward, he basely refused to pay the price which had been agreed upon. And Hercules was forced to go away without his wages.



THE BRAVE DEEDS OF BEOWULF.

I.—The Hall of the King.

THERE was once a king of the Danes whose name was Hrothgar, and who was filled with warlike spirit. He had under him a band of hardy warriors for whose entertainment he built a great hall larger than had ever been seen in his kingdom. And when it was finished they held within it many a banquet, at which the king gave rich presents to those of his warriors who had fought best for their master.

But before long the sounds of merriment were hushed within that hall. For there came one night from the lonely fen not far away a dreadful monster named Grendel, who seized thirty of the king's men and bore them off to his den across the moor.

Great was the fear and loud the mourning among the companions of the king. But the cruel monster came again and again to the hall, and each time the monarch's band of brave warriors was made less. Hrothgar was in despair, for with all his valour he felt that he was powerless against such a foe. Nor was there one among his men, brave as they were, who dared come to hand-grips with the grim dweller on the bleak and lonely moorland.

At last it came to the ears of Beowulf, a warrior of the Goths, that the kingdom of the Danes was in great distress; and he made up his mind to set out for Denmark, and free the king and his people from their fear.



So with a chosen band of dear companions he set foot upon the shores of Hrothgar's kingdom, and was directed by the warden of the coast to the royal city of the king.

Great was the joy at his presence and his noble bearing. "We have come, O king," he said to the Danish monarch, "as friends and deliverers. I myself have met single-handed many monsters of land and ocean, and I beg

the honour of a contest with this destroyer of your peace."

The king looked at him with pride in his eye. "Young man," he said, "your father was my friend. Come first to the feast, and as we sit at meat I will tell you the story of our woes and our heavy loss."

Then, as they sat at the feast, Beowulf heard how Grendel had brought grief to the kingdom. As he listened, the eyes of the hero gleamed with light, and all the company turned to look upon him. And as they looked one of them became suddenly jealous of the hero's fame, and he said in a mocking voice,—

"Great have been your deeds, Beowulf, but a greater task awaits you. And I feel sure that your good fortune will fail you when you come to measure your strength with this fierce monster."

Then the eyes of Beowulf gleamed with an angry light. "Let me tell you a tale," he said quietly. "Long ago, when I was a youth, I made my way with a comrade to the margin of the sea, and with drawn swords between our teeth we swam out to do battle with the monsters of the deep.

"Now when we met them spouting upon the surface of the water, one of them seized me by the body, and dragged me to the bottom of the


sea. My stout shirt of mail protected me, and with my sword I killed the monster. Then came another, and yet a third, and with these also I fought, and I had the victory. Never yet was seen such deadly fighting beneath the loud waves of the ocean. With Grendel then, who has challenged the Danes in vain, will I fight when the time has come."

As he looked at the flushed face of the hero, the king knew that in this man was all the help he needed. So he bade his men pass round the mead-cup, and to make merry while they might. The sound of the harp arose in the hall, and many a jovial song was sung.

Then when the loud feast was at its height there came into the hall the gold-crowned queen of Hrothgar, and to a man all rose to greet her. And taking a wondrous golden mead-cup from the board she held it first to the lips of the king, and then to the lords, according to their rank.

Soon she came to the place where Beowulf sat, and gave him the cup in his turn. And the hero, rising, bowed before her, and said, "I have taken upon me, O queen, a desperate task, but I will work the will of your lord, or fall in the death struggle with the monster of the fen." The brave words pleased the queen,



and she moved away to the head of the hall to seat herself by the king's side. 

VII.—Beowulf meets with Grendel.

When the banquet drew near to its end the heart of the king grew sad, for he knew that the time was once more approaching for the visit of Grendel the terrible. But there was some hope in his heart, for now he had by his side a champion who had won the mastery in combat with many a foe.

Then he spoke to the hero, "Never before have I given the charge of this royal hall to any stranger. Resolve on success. Show manly spirit. Keep sleepless watch against the foe. All your desires shall be granted if you win success in this grim contest."

Soon the king, with his queen and body-servants, left the hall in the keeping of Beowulf. The hero took off his breastplate, and the helmet from his head. He gave them to his squire, along with his sword of trusty steel. Then he lay down on his couch with his warriors about him. Soon the weary men fell asleep—all but one, the heroic leader, who kept strict watch, and awaited quietly the coming of his foe.

He came in the dark midnight, rushing across the moor. Suddenly the doors of the hall burst

open, though they were fastened with bars of iron, and soon the monster trod the paven floor. He saw before him many warriors grouped together, asleep around their brave leader, and his low laughter rumbled through the hall.

Soon he drew near to the couch on which Beowulf lay, and quick as a flash the hero gripped his arm. This was a grasp so mighty that it struck fear even to the heart of Grendel. Never before had he felt in one hand the strength of the grip of thirty men.

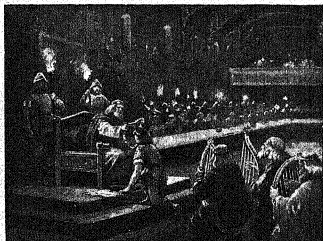
Such a greeting as this he had not met before in all his wanderings; and the monster would fain have escaped. But such was not Beowulf's will. Up he rose and grappled with the enemy, and the cracking of his fingers was heard throughout the hall.

In vain did Grendel strive to fling himself loose from the stern grip of his foe, for Beowulf held him fast and forced him to the combat. His mighty roaring woke the slumbering warriors, and smitten with fear they watched with round eyes and shaking limbs that deadly struggle.

Louder and louder grew the noise of the wrestlers. Out flew the swords of the watchers, who now had recovered from their fear and came forward to the help of their master. They did not know that the enemy was proof against

the choicest and stoutest blade ever forged by an armourer. Nor was it easy to take part in that fight, for the fear arose in their hearts that their blows might hurt the hero himself, so closely was he wrapped in Grendel's embrace.

Then there arose a cry of agony from Grendel



The king gave gifts to Beowulf. (See page 68.)

which seemed to rend the roof of the hall. The monster wrenched himself free, but with a deadly wound. Off he slunk to his den on the moorland, there to end his hateful life.

On the next day the king and his warriors came to the hall, and great was the joy at the story of Beowulf. With wondering eyes and

bated breath they marked the track of the monster over the moor, but not one of them dared to follow it. Soon a feast was prepared in the hall, and after the banquet the king gave Beowulf such gifts as heroes loved—a banner of gold, a shining helmet, a coat of mail of such richness as had never been seen before, and eight stout horses whose trappings were heavy with silver and gold.



III.—The Last Stern Fight.

After many adventures, of which we have not space to tell, Beowulf went back to his own country. For half a hundred years he ruled over his people in the Gothic land; and there was peace within the borders of his kingdom.

Then there came upon his land a sore trouble which brought grief to many. For a huge dragon with iron scales and fiery breath wasted the country far and wide. It had its home in a mound on a wide, rolling moorland, and there it guarded a rich store of wealth.

Long years before a great captain and hero had brought to this moor a mighty heap of treasure—gold, silver, and precious iron work. Then not long afterwards he died, and the hoard was left without an owner. But the deadly

dragon found the cave within the mound, made its home there, and thus became the warder of wealth untold.

One day there passed by the place a hunted slave who had wronged his master, and he looked with terror upon the scaly form of the dragon which lay not far from the entrance to the cave. The man, with trembling step, came forward, and seeing that the guardian of the place was wrapt in slumber, stepped softly within. There he saw the heaped-up treasure, and taking a cup of gold in his hand he made his way back to his master, hoping to please him by the gift which he had brought.

Before long the dragon awoke, and crawling within the cave knew at once what was missing. Then the monster turned and crawled towards the villages, leaving fire and death wherever it went. Husbandman and herdsman fled at its coming, crops and farms were burnt, flocks and herds destroyed. So there fell upon the land of Beowulf this dreadful scourge and sore trouble.

Before long the dragon dared to come even to the lofty hall of the king himself, and soon the walls of the palace were wreathed with tongues of flame. Then the anger of the king arose, and he vowed to free his land of the terror,

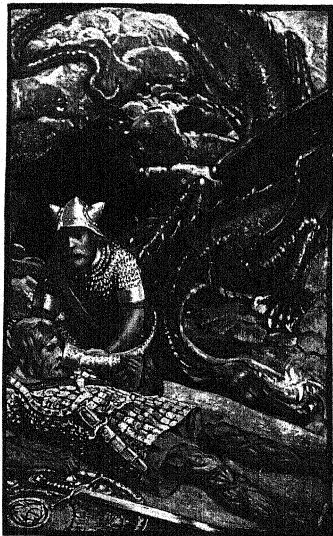
and give to his people once more the sweet blessings of peace.

So he sought out the armourer, and bade the man make for him a shield of hammered iron; for his shield of wood studded with iron was of small use in such a contest. And he made up his mind, the bold-hearted monarch, to lead against the monster only a small band of eleven of his trusty Goths.

Soon they set out, guided by the slave who had brought away the cup from the dragon's hoard. When they came to the mound, which stood upon a wind-beaten cliff by the sea, the king paused for a moment in the midst of his men.

"I have fought many a gallant fight," he said, "and once more I go out in search of renown. My coat of mail and my shield of hammered iron will guard me from the fiery breath of the monster. Fear not for me in this combat, in which I will engage alone. For the task is mine, and mine only, to free my beloved people from this scourge."

So he set out, and his men stood at a distance according to the command of the king. They saw him draw near to the mound, and heard him call aloud to the dragon within the cave. Then there came from the opening a spurt of flame,



The last stern fight.

and the earth beneath their feet shook as if in terror.

But the brave king did not falter, and it was the dragon which felt the fear. Yet it came on to the fight, and the bright sword of Beowulf sparkled in the sunlight. Then it fell with a clash upon the monster's iron scales. Soon the two were hidden from the sight of the watchers in a cloud of smoke.

Fear seized the hearts of the Goths, and they sought shelter in a wood not far away; all but one named Wiglaf, who went forward, sword in hand, to the help of his royal master. But his shield was of wood, and soon was consumed; and now the iron shield of Beowulf served as a shelter for two.

Stern and long was the fight which followed, and Wiglaf was at last able to wound the dragon, which fell to the earth. Then Beowulf gave it the death stroke, and it lay stretched out upon the plain. But the brave king was wounded sorely, and he sank down in a swoon on a broad boulder near the opening of the cave.

Wiglaf came to his help, and gently loosed the helmet from his head. Then he brought water from a well not far away. But the hero knew that the last of his fierce combats had been fought.

"I have ruled my people with justice and

mercy," he said; "hence have I happiness now that the end draws nigh. But bear the treasure from the cave, that my heart may rejoice at the sight of it before I pass away."

Then Wiglaf entered the mound and brought out the gold and silver cups and vessels, the brazen helmets, shields, and breastplates, the ornaments and trinkets; and he laid them down in a glittering heap near the place where the king was seated. And the dying monarch rejoiced greatly that he was able to leave such a wealth of treasure to his people.

"Thanks be to the great Captain, the Lord of Heaven," he said, "for all that I have done through His help. My time is at hand." Then he took from his neck the circlet of gold and gave it to his faithful helper. And ere long he lay on the green sward victorious in death.



SIEGFRIED AND KRIEMHILDA.

I.—The Nibelungs.

SIEGFRIED was the son of a king who ruled in the country known as the Netherlands. But when he was a little child his mother fell into disfavour, and was forced to leave her palace and to wander lonely in a mighty forest. After trudging many a weary mile she came at last to a glade from which she heard the sound of a hammer upon an anvil, as though some smith were busy at his work. Weary and spent with her journey, she sank down on a bed of leaves with her baby on her breast.

As she lay there, between life and death, the smith came out of his workshop and caught sight of her. He was a dwarfish man with a cunning look, and wore a long cap with the tassel hanging over his brows. "Ha! what have we here?" he cried; but the queen had only strength to place her child in his arms before she breathed her last.

There was now nothing else for the smith to do but to take the boy home and bring him up as his own. This he did, and when Siegfried was old enough he set him to work in the smithy. But the boy seemed to be unhappy and out of his place in the workshop. He



would only work by fits and starts, and when he did take a hammer in hand he broke one anvil after another with his heavy blows.

At last the smith grew tired of him, and he sent him one day into the depths of the forest to seek charcoal, hoping that while he was there a certain fierce dragon would make an end of him. In this he was disappointed, for the boy met the dragon, killed it, and having cut it up and boiled it, bathed in the water. But by some curious chance, as he leapt into this strange bath a linden leaf flew down from a tree and stuck to his shoulders; and the place where it rested was untouched by the dragon broth.

Now Siegfried knew that by means of this bath he had made himself proof against sword-cuts and wounds of every kind. But he did not know of the linden leaf, or he would certainly have taken a second bath so as to leave no weak spot in his body.

Having once more put on his armour and taken up his stout sword, which he had forged with great care in the smithy, he set out, gay of heart, to seek adventures. He travelled far over sea and land, and after passing through many great dangers, met at last with the Nibelungs.

These were two young princes whose father



had died and left them a hoard of treasure so great that its value had never been counted. When Siegfried first came upon them they were seated on the side of a mountain with the treasure between them, wondering by what fair means they could divide it into two equal portions.

There lay great heaps of shining gold and as many jewels as would have taken twelve wagons to carry away. Besides these, there was a Sword named Balmung, which had been forged by the fairy smiths, and was fit for the bravest hero that ever lived; also a Wand, by means of which its owner could gain power over his enemies; as well as a Cloak of Darkness, which not only made the wearer invisible to all eyes except his own, but also gave him the strength of twelve men.

Seeing Siegfried ride by, the two princes asked him to be judge between them, and they offered him the Sword Balmung for his trouble. The young hero then did his best to make a just award; but he only succeeded in vexing each of the brothers, and they began first to abuse and then to threaten him, each accusing him loudly of unfairness.

Then the hero's spirit rose, and taking the Sword Balmung from the Nibelungs he slew



The boy met the dragon, and killed it. (See page 75.)

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both of them, and took the treasure hoard for himself. But there came out of the cave in which it had been kept an army of dwarfs, who swarmed over the treasure and dared Siegfried to come near. These, however, he quickly dealt with, and he made them swear to watch the hoard for him who had now by the fortune of war become their master.

In this way Siegfried became the owner of the Sword Balmung, the Wand of Power, and the Cloak of Darkness, as well as such a hoard of gold and jewels as had never been seen by mortal eyes before.

II.—Siegfried goes to Worms.

Now there was living at that time, in the city of Worms on the Rhine, a lovely young princess whose name was Kriemhilda. She was as good and wise as she was beautiful, and many a brave and handsome warrior wished to win her as his wife.

One night the maiden dreamed a dream which caused her much disquiet; for she seemed in her vision to be out on a moorland hunting with her favourite falcon, when two fierce eagles swept down upon it and killed it. When Kriemhilda told the dream to her mother, the aged queen looked troubled, and said, "The



falcon is your husband, whom may God protect." And no more would she say.

The maiden tossed her head, free and happy-hearted. "Then the dream has no meaning for me, my mother," she said, "seeing that I have no husband, nor ever mean to take one." Then she ran away as light-hearted as she had been before the dream had come to trouble her.

Now the young Prince Siegfried was living at that time at the royal court of his father, to whom he had returned after many wanderings. And having heard of the beauty of Kriemhilda, he made up his mind to ride to Worms and find out whether all that was told of her was true. And if it were so, he meant to win the princess for his bride.

But his father, being unwilling to lose him, tried to persuade him not to go to Worms. The king in that city, Gunther by name, was a crafty man, he said, who might work evil to Siegfried. But this only made the young hero more eager to go.

"I am a match for him and all his men," he said proudly; and the eyes of the old king, his father, shone with pride as he looked at him.

"Go, then," he said; "and may the blessing of Heaven go with you."

Soon the prince with eleven of his bravest


knights set out for the city of Worms, where they arrived in seven days. And as they rode proudly through the streets the people gazed upon them with wonder and admiration. Their golden helmets glittered in the sunshine, their rich cloaks fell in graceful folds from their shoulders, their bridles shone with gold and jewels, and their saddle-cloths with silver thread.

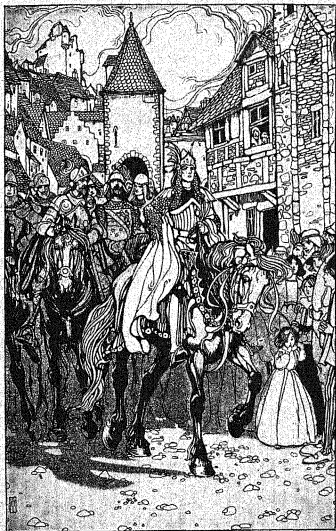
Then there met them a band of warriors almost as finely dressed as themselves. Having greeted the strangers courteously, they asked them what was their business, and Siegfried said, "I wish to speak with King Gunther."

"Ride, then," said the leader of the other party, "to his hall, which you can see not far away. There you will find him with his troop of men-at-arms."

In a short space of time Siegfried reached the hall of the king, and Gunther stepped down from his royal seat to meet him. "Why have you, noble Siegfried, come into this city of mine?" he asked; and the young man said,—

"I have heard it said that no king of any country is braver or bolder than you, and therefore have I come to try my might against yours. Your broad lands and your castles shall be mine sooner or later."





They rode proudly through the streets.

Gunther was filled with surprise at this strange answer. Great was the anger of his warriors, and there were some among them who called loudly for their armour and their swords. But after a while there came into the mind of the impetuous young hero the thought of the beautiful maiden for whose sake he had come to the royal city, and his heart softened within him. With gentle words he now spoke to the warriors of Gunther, and before long all were seated in peace at the banquet-table.

Soon they went together out into the open fields to try their strength and skill in manly games. Then some one ran to tell the Princess Kriemhilda how the warriors and the stranger prince were engaged in friendly rivalry. And unseen by those below she crept to the window of her bower, which overlooked the field.

There she watched them, and marked how in all that was done the noble Siegfried was ever foremost. He, too, thought often of the princess for love of whom he had left his father's court, and he longed to meet with her. Little did he guess that while such thoughts were in his mind, she was watching him and noting with pleasure how easily he excelled all others.



III.—Gunther sails to Iceland.

For the space of a whole year Siegfried stayed with King Gunther, spending his time in hunting or in warlike games, and sometimes helping his royal friend against his foes. And during all this time the young prince never once saw Kriemhilda. But at the end of the year he spoke with her at last, as you shall hear.

King Gunther had it in his mind to hold a festival in his royal city, and he sent out messages to all his friends round about; and when they came he gave them rich gifts, according to the generous custom of the time and country. Soon the revels were at their height, and there was feasting and singing and dancing such as had never been known in Worms before.

Then when the merriment was greatest, King Gunther, on the advice of one of his lords, sent for his sister Kriemhilda to come with her mother and her maidens to the festival hall. So they dressed themselves in the richest of their garments, and made haste to obey the king's command.

Never before had been seen such a beauteous band, and foremost among them in beauty was the sister of the king. Upon her lovely garments shone many a rare and precious gem, and her bright face was flushed with a rosy red more

beautiful than the sunset sky at eventide. Siegfried's heart sank within him when he saw her, and he said to himself, "How unworthy I am! How can I ever hope to win so fair a bride?"

Then, as he stood thus sunk in thought, the princess looked upon him with a happy smile.

"You are welcome to our halls, Prince Siegfried," she said softly; and the bold hero could at first find no words with which to answer her. So he bowed low before her, and then, as if driven by an unseen power, he stepped forward, and she placed her hand in his.

"With all my heart will I serve you to the end of my days," he said.

Then the princess was content. During the rest of the festival the lovers remained always side by side.

One day King Gunther came to Siegfried to beg for his help.

"Far away across the sea, in Iceland," said he, "lives a queen of matchless beauty, named Brunhilda. Many tales have seamen told me of her lovely face and her courage; for she is of great strength, and skilful in the use of arms. And no one may win her who cannot beat her at throwing the spear, at hurling the stone, and at leaping."

"Now I have made up my mind to win her,



"You are welcome to our halls," she said.

but I need your help. If by your means I can bring her to Worms as my queen, then Kriemhilda shall be yours."

"It shall be done," said Siegfried, who, in his youthful wanderings, had already visited Queen Brunhilda. "Let us take with us two of your most trusty friends, and lose no time in setting out upon our way."

Then they went to Kriemhilda and told her what they meant to do.

Gladly she set to work to provide them with garments fitting for such an errand. Calling her maidens together, she worked with them all day and far into the night for the space of several weeks; and when their work was done the king and his friends were provided with garments richer than any one had ever seen in that country before.

Then the king gave orders for a ship to be got ready, and soon it was moored to the wharf by the bank of the Rhine. Kriemhilda and her bower-maidens came to bid the warriors God-speed; and no one who saw her bright eye and cheerful face would have guessed that she was secretly moved with grief at the parting.

Stepping forward to Siegfried, she said in a low voice, "Sir Siegfried, I give my brother into your safe keeping."

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"With my life, and if need be with my death, I will serve him," was the answer. Then, without a word about themselves or their future meeting, the prince and princess parted.

Soon the wind filled the sail of the little vessel, which moved quickly down the stream. Siegfried stood at the helm, and steered for the open sea. For twelve days they ran before a favouring wind, and came at last to the rock-bound shores of Iceland, the country of the beauteous Queen Brunhilda.

IV.—The Meeting with Brunhilda.

The boat drew near to the walls of a castle built close to the mouth of a broad river. The windows were open, and near them could be seen many a lovely maiden looking out upon the travellers.

"Look among them," said Siegfried to Gunther, "and tell me which of them you would choose for your own."

Gunther eyed them closely, and, after a few moments, said, "One is dressed in a snow-white garment, and to my eyes she is the fairest of them all. If I had power to wed her, she should soon be queen in my royal city."

"You have chosen well, for that is Brunhilda," said Siegfried. As they looked the



maidens all at once disappeared from sight. But it was not shyness which had driven them away. Before long they were seen at the windows again, but now they were all dressed in the richest of their garments in honour of the strangers.

Soon the four visitors had landed on the shore. Siegfried himself led forth Gunther's horse, and held it while the monarch mounted. Then he sprang upon his own white charger, and the two, dressed in raiment as white as driven snow, rode slowly to the castle gate.

The gate was at once unlocked, and the stewards of Brunhilda came out to greet the strangers. Down sprang the two princes and their attendants, their horses were led away, and they were all conducted to the banquet-hall and placed in seats of honour. Then a servant was sent to tell the queen of their arrival; but already one of the maidens who had seen the strangers land had told her royal mistress that she felt sure one of them was the far-famed Siegfried.

Then said the queen, "If the mighty Siegfried is here to win me as his wife, it is like to cost him his life, for I do not fear him enough to become his bride." Soon Brunhilda was arrayed in her richest robes, and with a hundred

fair maidens and five hundred armed warriors as her attendants, she moved forward towards the banquet-hall to the sound of merry music.

The four strangers rose to their feet as this great company entered the hall.

"Welcome, Siegfried," said the queen; "tell me to what I owe the honour of your visit."

"This noble warrior," said Siegfried, pointing to Gunther, "is a king in the Rhineland, and it is his love for you that has brought us hither."

"I will stake a venture with him," said the brave queen, "and if he can overcome me I will be his wife. He must hurl the spear with truer aim than I. Then he must throw the stone and overtake it in one leap. Take heed, for if he should fail your lives must pay the forfeit."

"I would stake everything to win *you*, my fair queen," cried Gunther; and the preparations were made at once for the trial. *g*

V.—*The Trial of Gunther.*

The queen now put on a silk doublet, and over it a breastplate, while on her left arm she hung a broad and heavy shield. It took four of her attendants to carry this shield, but the warrior queen lifted it with one hand quite

readily. Meanwhile, Siegfried had slipped away unseen to the ship, where he hastily put on the Cloak of Darkness. Then he hurried back and stood by the side of Gunther, unseen of all the company.

When an open space had been marked off, the servants of the queen brought out her spear. So heavy was it that it took three of her men to lift it, and when Gunther saw it he began to wish himself back in his own home. Then came twelve men bearing the heavy stone which the queen was to throw when she had hurled the spear. At the sight of it the hearts of the strangers sank within them. But there was no time for regret. It was now Gunther's part to stand facing the queen at the other end of the open space.

Brunhilda rolled up her sleeves and raised the mighty spear in her right hand, while on her left arm she bore her shield. Soon the spear hissed through the air, and struck upon the king's shield with a mighty clang. But behind that shield stood Siegfried, who caught the spear and hurled it back to the sender. Again it came hurtling through the air, and this time, piercing the shield of Gunther, sorely wounded the heroic Siegfried.

In the madness of pain the prince raised it,



Siegfried hurled it back to the sender.

and hurled it through the air once more ; but he had turned the point behind him, and it was the shaft only which struck loudly upon Brunhilda's breastplate of steel.

"I thank you, noble king," she cried ; "that shot has found its mark."

So the first part of the contest ended in victory for the stranger king.

The queen now turned aside with anger in her heart. Lifting the huge stone, she threw it with great force, so that it fell twelve good arms'-lengths from the place where she stood. Then with a flying leap through the air she cleared the stone by a pace.

Next came Gunther to his trial of strength and agility. It was he who lifted the stone from the earth, but it was by the might of Siegfried that it was hurled through the air. It fell beyond the place reached by the queen.

Then Siegfried, unseen of all, laid his arm about the waist of Gunther, and leapt with him bodily past the spot where the stone had rested. Brunhilda became for a moment red with wrath. Then turning to her people, she said, somewhat sadly, "Ye must pay duty to King Gunther, who is now your lord and mine."

The king came forward at that moment, and taking him by the hand, she led him into

the palace. Meanwhile, Siegfried had taken back his magic cloak to the ship, and quickly returned once more to the company.

VI.—Siegfried visits his Treasure-house.

When all were seated at the banquet, Siegfried spoke craftily of the contest that *was still to come*.

The queen showed great surprise at his ignorance of what had taken place; but Hagen, one of the two lords who had come with Gunther, spoke up, "Siegfried had gone back to our ship while our royal master strove in the game with you; therefore he knows nothing of what has happened."

So it was told to Siegfried how Gunther, as all thought, had won in the trials to which the queen had invited him. Then said Siegfried with a smile, "These are welcome tidings, fair lady, and now you must go back with us across the sea."

"Not until I have called together my friends and told them all my tale," said Brunhilda. "And the best loved among them must be sent before me to your country."

So she sent heralds to call her friends from far and near to her castle. And when Siegfried saw them come pouring in fully armed as if for



war, he began to wonder whether, after all, Queen Brunhilda meant to play them false. He found that the same thought had entered into the minds of his friends, and he said to them, "We must prepare for the danger which clearly seems to be coming upon us. I will go at once and bring to your help a band of chosen warriors never seen by you before. You must not seek to go with me. My journey will take me across the sea, but before many days have passed I will be with you once more."



Then, clad in his Cloak of Darkness, he went on his way to the ship; and soon it was speeding across the water, though none could see the steersman. After a journey of a day and a night, he came to the country of the Nibelungs, where the dwarfs kept his store of treasure. Leaving his little ship safely moored, he climbed up a steep mountain, on the top of which stood a great castle near the opening to the treasure-cave.

Just within the gate he could see the giant who acted as warder with his weapons by him. Siegfried began to hammer on the gate.

"Who comes knocking so loudly at the door?" cried the porter.

"I am a warrior," answered Siegfried. "Undo for me the gate, and quickly too."

The answer of the giant was to gird on his armour, set his helmet on his head, seize his mighty shield, open the gate, and set upon Siegfried without any delay.

Then began a desperate combat; and though Siegfried was pleased to see how well the porter helped to guard the treasure, he found himself in no small danger. The air rang with the clash and clang of the fight, and soon the dwarfs ran out from the castle in a body to bring the struggle to an end.

The prince grasped their leader by the beard, and cried, "My name is Siegfried!"

"This is goodly news," was the answer, and all at once there was peace.

Then Siegfried made known the purpose of his visit, and in a short space of time he had at his back a thousand soldiers called to his aid by the dwarfs. Before many days the prince stood once more in the royal hall of Brunhilda.

"Who are these bold warriors?" asked the queen, pointing to his company of a thousand men.

"They are now the guards of my master the king," said Siegfried, "and they seek the honour of escorting you back with them to Rhineland." And with this reply Brunhilda was forced to be content.

VII.—Siegfried wins his Reward.

Before long the ships bearing the marriage party were upon the sea. When they had travelled for nine days, one of his two knights said to King Gunther, "We have sent no news of our coming to Worms. Your heralds ought to have been there long ago. Yet there is time for a quick messenger to reach the city before us."

"That is well," said the king; "and no man is better fitted to undertake the duty than you."

"Nay," said the knight, "send Siegfried, and leave me to attend upon the company here."

So it was arranged, and Siegfried, having landed near the Rhine mouth with four-and-twenty riders, made his way quickly to Worms, where at first he was received with some misgiving.

"He comes without the king!" was the cry on every hand. But the bright face of Siegfried calmed their fears, and his joyful tidings soon drove them completely away. Before long the hero stood in the presence of his beloved lady. But her first question was concerning the safety of her brother.

"He sends his duty to you," said Siegfried, "he and his bride; and he bids me say that before long he and Brunhilda hope to greet you in person."



The bright face of Siegfried calmed their fears.

Then the face of Kriemhilda grew bright, and she smiled at the hero, and bade him welcome for himself.

"Pay me the herald's fee," said Siegfried merrily; and she gave him four-and-twenty buckles set with jewels. These he handed round in a generous mood to the ladies who waited upon Kriemhilda.

Siegfried now told what Gunther wished to have done in preparation for the arrival of his bride, and said that the wedding was to take place at once; so the work was put in hand without delay. Then Kriemhilda, having dressed herself in her richest raiment, rode out with her maidens to meet the royal bride and bridegroom; and Siegfried walked by her side, with his hand resting lightly upon the bridle of her palfrey.

Before long the lovers saw on the opposite bank of the Rhine the king and his company making ready to cross the stream. Soon they stood upon the quay, where Siegfried and Kriemhilda waited to receive them. Brunhilda came forward towards her bridegroom's sister, and the two princesses kissed each other.

"You are right welcome, my sister," said the maiden. And all who looked at these kings' daughters thought they had never before seen



two maidens so well matched in grace and beauty.

Then the whole gallant company moved forward to the place where many gay pavilions and silken tents were set round a space of the greenest sward. After them followed a crowd of knights, ladies, and men-at-arms; and when all had taken their places, the games of skill and hardihood were begun.

Many a combat was fought between the knights, and soon the plain was half hidden by the dust of the mimic battle. Knight after knight proved his valour on that field, and won from his lady-love smiles more bright than victory. When the manly games were over, the royal party set out for the king's castle, where a great banquet was held.

At the head of the table sat King Gunther and his bride; and now Brunhilda was seen to wear a royal crown, as a sign that she had come as a queen to her kingdom. Then when all hearts were full of joy and merriment, Siegfried reminded King Gunther of his promise to give him the hand of Kriemhilda.

True to his word, the king called the beautiful princess before him; and she, placing her hand in that of the heroic Siegfried, vowed to love and serve him to the end of her days.



KING ARTHUR AND HIS KNIGHTS.

I.—The Coming of Arthur.

LONG, long ago there was a great king in the island of Britain whose name was Arthur, and whose fame went out into all the lands round about; for he was wise and brave, and the most powerful lords of his day were proud to serve under his banner.

Now this was the story which was told of his birth. Uther, king of Britain, lay on his death-bed, and his heart was sad within him because he had no son to rule his kingdom when he should pass away. Beside him stood the wise men, Bleys and Merlin, who for many a long year had helped him to rule the realm.

Now when the king had died, the two wise men left the castle and went out to breathe the cool air of night. But they found a tempest raging which seemed to shake both earth and sky. And as they fought their way against the wind they saw far out on the water a vessel shaped like a winged dragon, and bright from stem to stern with shining forms. For a moment they saw it, and no more.

Then the two stepped down to the entrance of a cave by the margin of the sea and watched

the angry waters fall, wave after wave, each one mightier than the last.

They counted the waves as each rose in an arch and fell with a long line of spray creeping up to their feet. The ninth wave, which seemed to gather half the sea, slowly rose and plunged towards them with a mighty roar, and as it were the sound of many voices. And on this wave was borne a naked child, which fell at Merlin's feet.

Stooping down, the sage lifted the babe in his arms, and cried, "The king! Here is an heir for Uther!" Then the great breaker sweeping up the beach seemed to wrap him and the child within a mantle of flame. And there fell a great calm on sea and sky.

Then Merlin brought the babe back to the castle, and gave him into the charge of a good knight, Sir Ector, whom he trusted. And the child grew in stature and in wisdom.

He spent many long hours in roving about the country, and one day in his rambles he came to a pass in which lay a dark and gloomy mountain tarn. The place was avoided by all the country people, who used to tell, in the winter evenings, many dark tales of what had been seen there.

Long years before, two brothers, one of them a king, who hated each other, had met in this

pass and fought together; and each had slain his brother at a blow.

There they lay as they had fallen, and the winds sang a doleful song over their bones. Now he that had been a king still wore on his head a crown set with diamonds, one in front and four upon each side. And the young lad Arthur, coming up the pass when the moon was shining through a mist, trod without knowing it upon the bones of the king.

Then, with the movement, the crown parted from the head and, turning on its rim, rolled down the hillside towards the tarn. And Arthur, with the quick step of youth, ran after it, caught it, and set it on his head; and in his heart he heard a murmur, "Lo, thou likewise shalt be king!"

II.—The Sword in the Anvil.

After the death of King Uther the kingdom was for a long time in great confusion; for every great lord that had many men under him wished to make himself king of the land.

Then Merlin went to the archbishop and advised him to ask all the great lords to meet in London at Christmas; for he hoped that when they were all gathered together some sign would be granted them to show who should be the rightful king of the realm.



So the lords came together in the great church in London; and after prayers had been said they went out into the churchyard, where they beheld a wondrous sight. For there stood a great square stone, and upon it an anvil of steel, a foot in height; and through the anvil and the stone was stuck a sword, on which these words were written in letters of gold:—

HE WHO PULLETH THIS SWORD OUT OF THIS
STONE AND ANVIL IS THE RIGHTFUL
KING OF THIS REALM.

Now when they had read these words they tried, one great lord after another, to pull out the sword. But none were able so much as to move the sword from its place. Then they agreed among themselves to call a meeting on a future day, and let any man who wished try to draw out the sword.

Upon New Year's Day the lords met together at a tournament; and among those who came were Sir Ector, who had the charge of Arthur from his childhood, with Sir Kay, his own son. Now, as they rode through London towards the place of meeting, Sir Kay found that he had left his sword behind, so he asked the young lad Arthur to ride back and fetch it for him.



"That I will, and gladly," said the boy; but when he reached their lodging he found no one in the house, for all had gone out to see the tournament.

Then Arthur said to himself, "I will ride to the churchyard and take the sword from the stone, for I am unwilling that my brother should be without a sword this day." So he came at length to the churchyard, where he alighted; and he laid his hand upon the sword and drew it out of the stone. Then, mounting his horse, he brought the sword to his foster-brother Sir Kay.

Now as soon as Sir Kay saw the sword he knew that it was the sword from the stone; so he rode up to his father and said, "Sir! here is the sword which none could draw from the stone. Surely I must be the king of the land!"

But when Sir Ector saw it he took it in his hand, and led his son and the young lad Arthur within the great church. There he commanded his son to tell him truly how he had come by the sword.

"Sir," said Sir Kay, "my brother Arthur brought it to me."

Then Sir Ector turned to Arthur, who stood near, and asked him how he came by the sword; and Arthur replied,—



(1,291)

Sir Ector led them to the church.

“When I reached home I found none in the house to give me my brother’s sword ; and I was grieved that Sir Kay should be swordless, so I came here and pulled the sword out of the stone.”

“Then,” said Sir Ector, “I know well that you must be king of this land.”

“Wherefore should *I* be king?” asked Arthur.

“Sir,” was the answer, “because it is plainly so ordained. For the man who can draw this sword out of the stone shall be king of this realm, and reign. Now let me see whether you can put the sword back again into the stone.”

“That is no hard task,” said Arthur, and without delay he put the sword into the place from which he had taken it. Then Sir Ector tried to take it out again, but he could not.

“Now try to take out the sword, my son,” said Sir Ector to Sir Kay. But though the young man pulled at the sword with all his might, he could not move it.

“Now you shall try again,” said Sir Ector to Arthur.

“With a good will,” said he, and pulled it out easily.

Then Sir Ector and Sir Kay knelt down upon the ground.

“Alas ! my father and my brother,” said Arthur to them, “why do you kneel to me ?”

"Nay, my lord," said Sir Ector, "I am not your father. You are of higher birth than any son of mine can be." Then the good knight told the lad how Merlin had brought him, a tiny babe, from the seashore to be nursed and brought up till the time should come when the kingdom should be his own.

Then Arthur was sad at heart when he knew that the good Sir Ector was not his own father. But the good knight cheered him, and begged only for himself that when Arthur should be king he would make Sir Kay the steward of all his lands.

"That I will, and gladly," said the youth. "Never shall any other man hold the office whilst I live."


Then they all went to the archbishop, and told him how the sword had been taken from the stone. And he commanded that Arthur should once more replace it, and that the lords should be called together again for another trial with the sword.

They came at his call, but no one except Arthur could take the sword from the stone. Then many of the lords were angry, and said that it was a great shame for the kingdom to be governed by a boy. And they all agreed to come again at a later date and put the matter



to the test. But once again it fell out as before, and at last the people set aside the angry lords, and cried,—

“We will have Arthur for our king. For it is clearly the will of God that he should rule this realm, and those who stand up against him we will slay with our own hands.”

Then the archbishop took Arthur and crowned him king before them all. 

III.—*The Sword Excalibur.*

One day King Arthur rode out with the wise man Merlin, and as they went along the king said, “I have no sword.”

“It is no matter,” said Merlin, “for a sword you shall have, and that right soon.”

So they went on till they came to a great lake. And King Arthur looked out upon its broad waters and saw, to his wonder, an arm rise out from the middle of the mere. Over the arm was a sleeve of the softest silk, and the hand held aloft a sword which sparkled with a thousand lights.

“Lo!” said Merlin, “yonder is the sword of which I spoke.” Then all at once they saw a fair maiden in a barge upon the lake. Swiftly she drew near to them, and stepping lightly upon the beach she bowed low before the king.



"Maiden," said Arthur, "what sword is that which is held by the arm yonder above the water? I wish it were mine, for I have no sword."

"Sir king," said the maiden, "the sword is mine; but it is appointed to be used by yourself as king of this realm."

"By my faith!" said King Arthur, "I will use it as becomes a true knight and king."

"Then," said the maiden, "step into the barge and row yourself to the sword, and take it with the scabbard. And use it hereafter as you have said."

Then King Arthur and Merlin got down from their horses, and tied them to trees. And entering into the barge they came at length to the sword which was held above the water. King Arthur took it by the hilt, and the arm and hand were drawn under the surface again. Then the two men came once more to the land, but the maiden of the lake could nowhere be seen; so they mounted their horses and rode away.

When King Arthur looked more closely at the sword he liked it well.

"Which do you like better," asked Merlin, "the sword or the scabbard?"

"The sword," answered the king.

"Then you are in ^{one take} error," said the sage, "for the scabbard is worth ten of the sword. While you have the sheath at your side you will lose no blood, no matter how sorely you may be wounded. Therefore keep the sheath always upon your girdle." So they rode back to the king's palace.

IV.—*Queen Guinevere.*

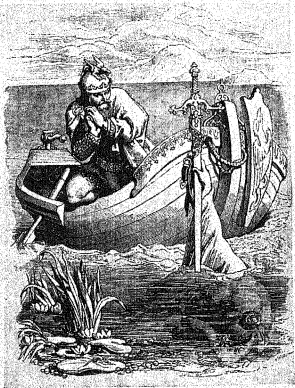
Now King Arthur took the wise man Merlin for his guide and counsellor, and was much ruled by him all the days of his life. And one day, as they walked together, the king said to the sage, "My lords will not let me be in peace, but they urge me day by day to take a wife. Now I will make no maiden queen of this realm but by your advice."

"It is well," said Merlin, "that you should take a wife, for the kingdom requires a queen. Now, is there any fair maiden that you love better than all the rest?"

"Yes, indeed," said the young king readily. "I love Guinevere, the daughter of King Leodegrance. She is the most gentle and the fairest lady of all that I have ever seen."

Merlin's face grew grave as the king, his master, spoke.

"Sir," he said, after a pause, "as for her



The sword was held above the water. (See page 109.)

beauty, she is one of the fairest maidens in the world. But, unless your heart is set upon her, I will find you another maiden both beautiful and good. Yet if your heart is set, you will, I doubt not, be unwilling to change."

"That is true," said King Arthur.

Then Merlin sought out the royal father of Guinevere, and told him that King Arthur wished to wed his daughter.

"This is the best news that I ever heard," said the king, "that so mighty a monarch should wish to make my daughter a queen. As for a wedding gift, I will not give your master lands, for he has enough, but I will send him the Round Table which King Uther gave to me. It is large enough to seat a hundred and fifty knights, and with it I can send him a hundred as good and brave knights as ever breathed."

So it was arranged that King Arthur should marry Guinevere, and should have with her the famous Round Table, with the hundred brave knights to form his royal bodyguard. And Arthur sent Launcelot, the best and bravest of his own knights, to bring the princess to her wedding.

It was a gay spring morning when the bride rode out on a cream-white mule from her father's castle to meet her royal bridegroom.

Then, in the boyhood of the year,
Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere
Rode through the coverts of the deer,
With blissful treble ringing clear ;

She seemed a part of joyous spring.
A gown of grass-green silk she wore,
Buckled with golden clasps before ;
A light-green tuft of plumes she bore
Closed in a golden ring.

So, with merry laughter, song, and talk, they
came at length to the palace of the king. Then
the archbishop was sent for, and the king was
wedded on that same day to the princess.

Then the knights who had been summoned to
wait upon their royal master lifted their swords
and sang before their king and queen :—

“ Blow trumpet, for the world is white with may ;
Blow trumpet, the long night hath rolled away !
Blow through the living world—‘Let the king
reign !’

“ The king will follow Christ, and we the king,
In whom high God hath breathed a secret thing.
Fall battle-axe and flash brand ! Let the king reign.”

Thus began the reign of Arthur and his
queen. And for a long time the king and his
brave knights set themselves to right all wrongs
within the kingdom ; to set free those who were



A goodly fellowship of famous knights.

in prison or oppressed; and to bring peace to the land, which had been torn by many wars.

V.—King Arthur and the Giant.

At one time King Arthur embarked upon the sea at Sandwich with a great army in many ships, and sailed away to the westward. Now, as the king sat in his cabin, he fell asleep and dreamed a wonderful dream.

He thought that he saw in his dream a dreadful dragon come flying out of the West. Its head was blue as the summer sky; its shoulders seemed to be of burnished gold; its body was covered with scales like iron; its tail was like a whip of many lashes; and from its mouth came forth a fiery flame.

Then there came out of the East against the dragon a fierce black boar with sharp tusks, and legs as big as posts; and he roared so loudly that it was terrible to hear him. Then the two monsters fell to fighting, and the dragon slew the boar and ground him all to powder, both flesh and bones, and the powder was blown by the wind far over land and sea. Thereupon the king awoke, and was much puzzled to know the meaning of his dream. So he sent for Merlin, and asked him what it meant.

"Sir," said the sage, "the dragon stands for



your own self, who always wear upon your helmet the dragon crest. The boar is some tyrant or giant who is to be overcome by you. Therefore doubt not nor fear, but go on your way prepared for conquest."

Before long they drew near to a rocky coast, on which they landed. Then there came a man of that country to the king, and told him that a certain great giant troubled the people of those parts. For he often came out of his den and wasted the land and killed the people, even the little ones at their mother's side. "And now," said the countryman, "he has taken captive the Duchess of Brittany and her servants as they passed through the land, and carried them off to his mountain cave. Now, therefore, O king, have pity upon her and upon us, and deliver us all from this monster."

"Can you lead me to the place where this monster makes his home?" asked the king.

"That I can," said the man, "and easily. Yonder can be seen, up the side of the mountain, two great fires. Near to them is the giant's cave, in which, I doubt not, can be found more wealth than could be seen in any place except the treasury of the king."

Then the king went back to his tent, and sent a servant to bring Sir Kay and another knight

named Sir Bedivere at once to his presence. When they came before him he bade them make ready horses and armour, for he meant to go with them, he said, to the mountain. So they hastened to equip him at all points ; and having also armed themselves, they rode as fast as they could till they came to the foot of the mountain. Then the king and his companions drew rein.

"Stay here," said Arthur, "for I will go alone up the mountain." Then he went up the slope until he came to a great fire, and there he found a woman sitting, dumb with sorrow, by the side of a grave newly made. The king saluted her, and asked her the cause of her great grief.

"Speak gently, sir knight!" she said in a whisper, "for yonder is a monster who, if he hears you, will come at once and destroy you. Why came you to this mountain? For fifty men as brave as you would do little against this giant. Here, in this grave, lies my mistress, the Duchess of Brittany, who met her death at his foul hands."

"I am come," said Arthur, "from the king himself to rid the earth of this monster."

"But he pays no heed to king or any man," said the woman.

King Arthur spoke no word in reply, but strode to the spot where the giant sat making a meal. He was indeed dreadful to look upon, and from his huge mouth came two sharp tusks like those of the boar of the king's dream.

The noble king quailed not at the sight of the monster.

"Arise and prepare yourself for combat," said he, placing himself in a posture of defence, "for this day you shall die at my hand."

Then the giant, with an angry snarl, sprang to his feet and raised his huge club high in the air. Down it came, but Arthur stepped aside, and the blow fell only upon the crest of his helmet, which was broken away; and, watching his time, the king wounded the giant again and again, so that he roared in anger at the pain of his wounds.

Then the giant threw away his club and caught the king in his arms. So fierce was his grip that he crushed him sorely. The wrestling bout was stern and long, and at last the two, locked in a tight embrace, rolled down the slope of the mountain to the margin of the sea. There they were seen by Sir Kay and Sir Bedivere; but before the two faithful knights could come to his help, the king had given the giant his death-blow.



The giant carries off the Duchess of Brittany. (See page 116.)

It took the utmost strength of the two knights to set free their master from that fierce grip. Then King Arthur said to Sir Kay and Sir Bedivere,—

“Go up the mountain and bring me my shield and sword and the club of the giant. As for the treasure, take it for yourselves. I have enough if the club of iron be mine. And give commandment that there be built a church on the mountain in the name of Saint Michael.”

This was done even as the king had said. And the land had rest from the trouble which had plagued the people for so long.

VI.—Sir Launcelot.

The knights of the Round Table rode forth day by day on the king's errands. And their duty was to help those who were in trouble, to free the land of those who were wild and lawless, and to make peace within the borders of the land.

The knights rode out sometimes alone, sometimes in company. Each day brought its adventure, and its victory or defeat. At times those who were in distress came or sent to the royal palace asking that some knight of the Round Table should be sent to help them against an oppressor. Then the king would

choose out one of his knights and give him the task of righting the wrong.

Among those who sat at the Round Table, the most renowned for bravery was Sir Launcelot. One day he rode out from the palace gate, and before he had gone very far he met a maiden riding on a palfrey.

"Sir," said the lady, "not far away there lurks a knight who is a terror and a pest to all gentlewomen, and I crave your help against him."

"He shames the name of knighthood, fair maiden," said Sir Launcelot, "and it is fitting that he should die. I will go with you and meet him. But ride you by yourself alone, and I will keep myself in covert."

So the maiden rode on at a gentle pace. And before long the craven knight came out of the wood and dragged the maiden from her horse. Then came Sir Launcelot as fast as he could ride, and struck the knight such a blow with his stout sword that he fell in a heap, and lay there dead.

"Now he has the payment he deserved," said Sir Launcelot.

"That is true," replied the maiden, "and no longer will he be a cause of distress to gentlewomen."

"Now, maiden," said Sir Launcelot, "can I serve you in any other way?"



"Nay, sir," said she, "not at this present time. And for your courtesy may God preserve you wherever you go."

Then the two parted company, and Sir Launcelot rode forward into a deep forest.

On the third day he came to a great bridge over a stream; and there ran forward suddenly a rough churl who struck at the knight's horse, so that it wheeled about.

"Why do you seek to ride over this bridge without leave?" asked the man.

"Why should I *not* ride this way?" was the answer.

"Because you have no choice in the matter," cried the other, and he struck at him with a great club set with spikes of iron. Then Sir Launcelot drew his sword, and made his path plain before him.

Now at the end of the bridge lay a village at the foot of a lordly castle, and Sir Launcelot rode straight to the castle gate. Then he alighted, and tied his horse to a ring in the wall. And he saw a beautiful green court, and round about it the windows of the castle were open, and many people looking out at him. Now as he looked he heard them cry, again and again, "Fair knight, thou art unfortunate."

Then there came against him two great giants



fully armed except that they wore no helmets, and with horrible clubs in their hands. Sir Launcelot at once put his shield before him, and, having parried the stroke of the one giant, clove his head with his sword. When the other saw what had happened he ran away in great haste; but Sir Launcelot leapt after him and clove him to the middle.

Then the victorious knight went into the hall of the castle, and there came before him three-score ladies, who knelt and thanked God and the knight for their deliverance.

"Fair sir," said one of them, "we have been here seven years as prisoners of these giants, and blessed be God who has sent so brave a champion to deliver us. We all pray you to tell us your name, that we may make known to our friends who it was that delivered us out of this foul prison."

"Fair ladies," said the knight, "my name is Sir Launcelot of the Lake. Now you can tell your friends who it was, by God's help, that delivered you. And if you meet me again show me such welcome as you can. As for the treasure in this castle, I give it to you as a solace for your hurt." So he went on his way as before.



Sir Modred sent a messenger to King Arthur.

VII.—The Passing of Arthur.

Now, the noble work of King Arthur was spoilt by wrong and treachery, for even among the best of his brave knights there were traitors to their lord; and none was so false as Sir Modred, who had wronged King Arthur greatly, and had hoped to make himself king in his place.

At last King Arthur marched with an army against Sir Modred. Now when the armies stood face to face, Sir Modred sent to King Arthur, asking to meet with him in full view of either host, and each of them to bring with him fourteen knights. To this the king agreed, and the two parties met for a parley.

Now, as the king spoke to Sir Modred, an adder came out of a bush and stung one of the knights in his foot; and he drew his sword to kill the adder, thinking no harm. But when the two armies saw the sword drawn they blew trumpets and horns, and raised a mighty shout.

Then before either of the leaders could check the onset the two armies closed, and there began a fierce fight which lasted till night came on. Great was the slaughter on either side, and King Arthur's heart was sore within him when he saw the field strewn with the bodies of so many brave men.



Looking up, he saw Sir Modred leaning upon his sword beside a heap of the dead.

"Give me my sword," said the king to one of his knights; and having received it, he ran towards Sir Modred, crying, "Traitor, now is your death-day come!"

When Sir Modred heard King Arthur he ran towards him with his sword drawn in his hand. Then the king pierced him through the body with his sword, and he fell forward with a mortal wound. But as he fell he struck King Arthur a heavy blow with his sword on the side of the head.

Thus Sir Modred lay dead on the earth, and the king lay in a swoon at his side. And the king's two faithful knights, Sir Lucan and Sir Bedivere, raised him up and led him to a little chapel not far from the edge of a great lake.

"It is best," said Sir Lucan, after a time, to the king, "that we should bring you to some town."

"That is true," said the king; "but I cannot stand for the aching in my head."

So Sir Lucan and Sir Bedivere took up the king to carry him; and with the effort Sir Lucan fell to the earth, and lay there a dead man.

Then Sir Bedivere began to weep for the death of so good a knight.

"Leave this mourning," said the king, "for it is of no help to me and to the good knight, for whose loss I, too, grieve at heart. My time is drawing near. Therefore take Excalibur, my good sword, and go with it to the water-side. And when you come there, throw my sword into the water, and come again to tell me what you have seen."

"My lord," said Sir Bedivere, "your command shall be obeyed, and I will at once bring you word again."

So the knight departed; and as he went he marked how the noble sword was set with precious stones of great value.

"If I throw this rich sword into the water," he said, "there shall come no good, but harm and loss."

So he hid the sword under a tree, and returning to the king told him that he had thrown it into the water.

"What, then, did you see and hear?" asked the king.

"Sir," said he, "I saw nothing but the heaving of the waters, and heard nothing but the moaning of the wind."

"That is untrue," said King Arthur; "therefore, if you love and honour me, go quickly and obey my command. Spare not, but throw the sword into the water."

Then Sir Bedivere went back again and took the sword in his hand; and once more he thought it a shame to throw away that noble sword. So he hid it again, and went and told the king that he had performed his command.

"What, then, did you see and hear?" asked the king faintly.

"Sir," said he, "I saw nothing but the heaving of the waters, and heard nothing but the moaning of the wind."

"Traitor," cried the king in wrath. "Now you have betrayed me twice. Who would have thought that one of the dearest of my knights would disobey me for the sake of a rich sword? But now go quickly a third time, for I fear that my wound has taken cold and I shall die. And

except you do as I command you, I will end your life with my own hands."

So Sir Bedivere went away again, and taking up the sword, came to the edge of the water. Then he threw it with all his might far out into the middle of the mere. And there rose a hand and arm from the bosom of the water and met the sword and caught it, then shook it three times, and drew it under the surface of the lake. Soon the knight came again to the king and told him of the wonder he had seen.

"Alas!" said Arthur, "help me now from this place, for I fear that I have stayed too long."

And Sir Bedivere, taking the king upon his back, bore him gently to the water-side.

As they drew near to the edge of the water there came towards them a barge with many fair ladies in it. All of them wore black hoods, and when they saw King Arthur they wept and wailed.

"Now put me into the barge," said the king to Sir Bedivere, and he did so as gently as he could. And three of the ladies who wore crowns of gold took the king and laid him on the deck, with his head resting on the lap of one of them.

"Ah, dear brother," said this queen, leaning



over him, "why have you tarried so long from me? Alas! this wound on your head has taken cold."

Then they rowed softly from the land, and Sir Bedivere was left alone.

"Ah, my lord Arthur," he cried in a piteous voice, "what shall become of me now that you leave me here alone among my foes?"

"Comfort yourself," answered the king. "I go to the Vale of Avilion to heal me of my grievous wound. But I will come again to this kingdom when the time has need of me."

As the barge moved gently across the great water Sir Bedivere stood watching it with shaded eyes. And as soon as it passed out of sight he ran weeping into the forest by the margin of the mere.



THE STORY OF CONALL.

I.—The Stone of Heroes.

ONCE upon a time there was a young prince in Erin who, before he came to his kingdom, set out on his travels that he might learn how to rule his people with wisdom and justice. He went to Greece and to Italy, and came at last to the Holy Land. Here he stayed for some time with a king who had a young sister more beautiful, more modest, and more gentle than any maiden whom the prince had seen in all his travels.

The young prince fell in love with this princess, and she with him. Then the prince, having made the long journey to Erin to ask leave of the wise men of his kingdom, came back once more to the Holy Land and married the king's sister. After the wedding he brought her home across the sea, and for some years the two ruled as king and queen in the land of Erin. They had three sons, and their names were Eobhan, Claidhean, and Conall.

While the youngest was a baby the two elder boys were sent to a learned Druid, who taught them with care all that a king's sons ought to know. One day the Druid took the king's children for a walk, and half-way up a steep



mountain they caught sight of a round brown stone lying all by itself.

"That," said the Druid, "is the Stone of Heroes. Any one who can lift it so as to allow the air to pass freely between it and the earth is plainly a hero."

First Eobhan tried to lift the stone. He put his arms about it, but he could only move it a little. Then his brother seized it; but he, too, was unable to lift it.

"You are but young and tender yet," said the Druid; "we will make the trial again."

In a year they came back again, when the eldest boy lifted the stone to his lap, while his brother raised it to his shoulder.

"There is no want of strength in you," said the Druid. "I can now give you over to your father again."

So the Druid took them back, and had his reward; and he returned bringing Conall with him. Carefully he taught him as he had taught his brothers, and one day he took him also up the side of the mountain. The young lad saw the stone, and asked about it as his brothers had done. Then he tried to lift it, and raised it from the earth a little.

"We will return in a year, and you shall try once more," said the Druid.

At the end of twelve months they went once again up the face of the mountain. Then Conall grasped the Heroes' Stone, raised it to his shoulder, and carried it to the top of the mountain, then down to the foot and back again, leaving the stone where he had found it.

"You have enough of strength if you have enough of swiftness," said the Druid. Then he pointed to a blackthorn bush that grew a short way from them, and said, "If you can give me a blow with that bush before I reach the top of the mountain, my work with you is over."

With that he ran swiftly up the hill. Conall sprang to the bush, pulled it out by the root, and ran after the Druid with it. And before the man was far up the mountain the lad was at his back striking his legs with the blackthorn bush.

The Druid stopped and said, "I will take you home and give you up to your father."

This he did, and he had a rich reward from the king.

One day the king of Erin sat with a friend upon a green mound, and looking up they saw a rider on a black horse come towards them through a shower of rain. When he came up

to them the king asked him what he wanted ; and looking straight at the monarch he said,—

“Give into my keeping for a year and a day Conall, your youngest son.”

“It shall be,” said the king, though his heart was sore within him, and he went home to mourn the loss of his son.

When a year and a day had gone by, the king sat on the mound once more, and his friend beside him. Soon he saw in the distance a shower of rain falling, and a man on a black horse coming through it, followed by another man. When the former reached the king he said, “Would you know your son if you saw him?”

“That I would,” said the king.

“There he stands,” said the man on the horse, pointing behind him.

“He is unlike my son,” said the king.

“It is he,” said the other ; and the lad said, “Father, it is I.” Then the king knew the voice of his son ; but so tall and stalwart was the lad that it was small wonder he had not known him at first.

“What will you take as a reward?” asked the king of the man on the horse.

“I will take only your blessing,” said the other. So the king blessed him, and he went his way.



II.—*The Princess Anna.*

One day when the king of Erin was sitting at home in his palace there came to him a messenger from the queen's brother. He brought news that the Turks had come into the kingdom, and were wasting the land as fast as they could.

Now the king of Erin had promised at his marriage to go to the help of his wife's brother if need should arise. So he made ready to set out for the Holy Land, intending to leave his own kingdom in the keeping of one of his sons. But the two elder brothers said that they would choose rather to go to the war than to stay at home in charge of the kingdom.

Then the king asked Conall to stay, promising him not only his blessing, but also the crown and the kingdom at his death.

"I will stay for thy blessing, father," said Conall, "though not for the kingdom of Erin."

Then his father was well content, and made ready with his warriors to go across the seas.

Conall went with them to the shore, and they went on board a ship, and hoisted the flapping sails up against the tall strong masts. And he watched the ship sail straight across the ocean until it was out of sight. Then he sat down on the shingle, heavy with sorrow; and there he tarried, heeding nothing till the incoming tide surrounded him and the splash of the waves awakened him from his dream.

He jumped up and began to scold himself for his carelessness. "It is no wonder," he said, "that some say I am too young to take care of the kingdom, since I cannot take care of myself."

Now the monarch of the neighbouring kingdom had also gone to the war, and had left his daughter behind, with five hundred men to guard her. She was one of the most lovely women that had ever been seen in the country, and she was known as the Princess Anna.

One day Conall, feeling very lonely in the

absence of his father and brothers, went to sit on a green mound. While he was there he saw a raven on a heap of newly-fallen snow with a piece of fresh meat in its bill. Then he said to himself that he would never take a wife but one whose hair should be as black as the raven, her face as fair as the snow, and her cheeks as red as the flesh in the beak of the bird. And when he told the tale to another, it was reported to him that the daughter of the king, his neighbour, was such a maiden. So the young prince set off without loss of time for the castle in which the princess lived.

On the way he came to the bank of a stream, but found that the ferry-boat was on the other side. So he put the palm of his hand on the end of his spear and its head into the water, gave a mighty spring, and landed safely on the farther bank. Then he climbed a hill, and saw beneath him the finest castle that had ever been seen in the world; and it was guarded by nine ranks of soldiers. Behind these were nine warriors as mighty as the nine ranks of men, and behind these again six heroes as strong as the nine warriors and the soldiers together. And upon the turrets of the castle hung the heads of those who had come at various times to win the hand of the beautiful Princess Anna!



Conall looked at the men who were guarding the castle, and at the heads on the turrets; but even then his heart did not fail. Next he looked up at an open window in the castle, and saw the princess combing her hair. Conall looked at her for a while. Then he put his palm on the end of his spear again, gave a mighty spring, and leapt in at the window beside the princess.

"Who is this youth that springs so roundly in at the window to see me?" asked the princess.

"One who has come to take you away," answered Conall.

The princess gave a laugh.

"Did you not see the soldiers guarding the castle?" asked she.

"I did," was the reply. "They let me come in, and they will let me go out."

She gave another laugh, and said, "Many have tried to take me out of this castle, and have paid with their heads. I advise you to think well before you act."

But Conall knew that if he thought too much about it he might not act at all. So without a word he put his arm round the princess and carried her out of the castle. Then resting his hand on the end of his spear, he leapt with her



He leapt in at the window.

over the ranks of soldiers, and ran away so quickly that the men could not see who it was that he carried under his arm.

When they were out of sight the prince paused to take his breath, and he set the maiden down upon a mound by the roadside.

III.—The Son of the Mighty.

The Princess Anna heaved a heavy sigh.

"What ails you?" asked Conall.

"Why, I am sad that such a coward as you should win me," said she—"the man who would not go to the wars with the king, his father, and who dared not stay to fight with my guards."

Now this was unjust, but it was said to prove him.

"Promise me not to leave this spot," he said, "and I will go back and tell your brave guards what I have done."

"I promise," she said, and Conall turned back towards the castle, prepared to fight even with five hundred men.

When he reached the men he asked their leader, "What would you do to the man who should take away the princess?"

"Strike off his head and set it on a pike," was the ready answer.

Then Conall looked at the nine ranks of men,

and marked the man who had the largest head and the thinnest body. He took him by the middle, and using him as a club knocked down one after another of his comrades before they could utter a cry. Then he drew his sword and laid low the nine warriors, and he dealt in the same way with the six heroes. Last of all he finished off the man who had served him for a club, and he left not one of the five hundred to carry away the news of that great combat.

Then Conall returned to the princess.

"Come now!" he said sternly, "and walk by my side. Let your foot be even with mine."

She rose and went away well pleased with him. Soon they reached the ferry and crossed over in the boat, and at last they came to the green mound at the foot of the mountain in the kingdom of Erin.

Then said Conall to the princess, "I must sleep, or I shall never do a deed of valour more. I will lay my head in your lap, and sleep until I wake."

"But," said the princess, "if there should be need to awake you before that time, how shall it be done?"

"Shake me roughly," said Conall; "and if that will not serve, take a piece of skin the breadth of a penny from the top of my head; and if



that will not wake me, strike me on the upper lip with a stone ; and if that does not wake me, let me sleep."

He laid his head in her lap, and in an instant he was fast asleep.

The princess sat quite still, looking rather sadly out across the sea, when suddenly she saw a boat coming quickly towards her. Within it there was a very tall man, and when it reached the shore he leapt out and dragged the boat high and dry above the water. Then in a few moments he stood before the Princess Anna.

"Where are you going?" asked she.

"I have heard," was the answer, "that no maiden in the wide world is more beautiful than the Princess Anna. So I am going to seek her for myself."

"That is a hard task," said she, "for her father left her in a strong castle with a guard of five hundred men."

The man looked hard at the maiden, and then he said, "I know you for the Princess Anna herself. Waken your champion who lies here asleep, and we shall see who has the best right to have you."

Then the princess began to rock Conall to and fro, but she could not waken him. And when she thought of the cruel means which she

had been told to use to rouse him, her heart failed her. So she said to the man,—

“I will go away with you if you will give Conall time to come in pursuit of us before you ask me to become your wife. You must wait for a year and a day.”

This the stranger, who was named Mac-a-Moir, or Son of the Mighty, promised readily.

Then the princess took the sword of Conall from its sheath, and wrote upon it with a pin what had happened. Next she exchanged the rings on Conall's finger and her own, and told Mac-a-Moir that she was now ready to go with him.

He picked her up, slung her over his shoulder, and went to the boat with her. Then he hoisted the flapping white sails against the mast, and swiftly sailed away across the dark blue water.

When Conall awoke he saw a herdsman standing not far away, but no Princess Anna was near him.

“I saw,” said the herdsman, “the one who was with you putting a ring on your finger.”

Conall looked, and saw that it was the ring of the Princess Anna.

“I saw her,” said the herdsman, “writing something on the blade of your sword.”

Conall looked, and read the tale of what had happened to the princess. Then he put his

sword into its sheath, and said, "I will never rest until I find the princess. Night and day will I search, and no man shall dare to stand in my path."

IV.—In the Land of Lochlann.

Soon Conall set sail in a little ship, and he sped across the sea until he came to the land of Lochlann, where on a plain by the sea he found some lads playing shinny; and one of them was the son of the king of that country.

The ball came near Conall, and he kicked it back to the players.

"Fellow," cried the prince, "for your insolence you shall play a game against me and my friends. If you win, you shall go free. If you lose, each one of us will hit you a blow on the head with his club."

Then Conall looked about him, and saw a crooked elder stick growing in the face of a bank. He plucked it by the root, and with his sword he soon made a fine club of it. Then they played three games, and in each game Conall was the winner. The prince was angry, so Conall struck *him* a blow on the head with his club, and went once more on his way.

Not long afterwards Conall met a little man who, when he saw him, began to laugh.



Conall was the winner.

"Why are you laughing?" asked Conall.

"Because I have met a man of my own country. My name is Duanach, and my father was a servant of your father. Will you take me for your servant?"

"That I will," said Conall heartily; and the two set out on their way. By-and-by they came to the city and palace of the king of Lochlann, and not far away they found a great castle in which, said the little old man, lived the best warriors in the land.

To these Conall sent a message bidding them lead out to him the Princess Anna, or get ready for battle. And they sent word to say that the Princess Anna was not there, but that Conall might have all the battle he cared for and a little more if he would wait till morning.

But Conall wished to bring matters to the test at once. So he leapt into the court of the castle, and served the warriors as he had served those who were set to guard the Princess Anna. Then he lay down on a bed in the castle, the softest that was to be found, and soon fell asleep.

Now as he slumbered he heard a voice which said, "Rise, rise from your couch, for your life is in danger."

He arose and looked out at the door, and saw a hundred carts and a hundred horses and a

hundred carters coming with food for the warriors of the castle. A piper walked behind them playing a merry tune. Conall went out to meet them at a narrow bridge across the stream, and he tumbled them one by one into the water. Then he went back and slept again.



Soon the king of the land heard what he had done. Then he told four of his strongest men to bring him the head of Conall before dinner should be served on that day. Out went the four men, and at the door of the castle they met the little old man Duanach who was Conall's servant. They told him their errand.

"If you kill the prince in his sleep," he said, "there will be no boy born in this land for seven years."

The warriors went off to tell the king this dreadful news, but he told them to go back and do their duty. Back they came, and the little old man said, "Let me feel the edges of your swords." They did so, and he said, "They are not sharp enough to do more than wound the prince; and if he wakes before you have done your work, he will not leave one of you alive."

So they went out to the grindstone to put a keener edge upon their blades; and while they were busy Conall dreamed a dream of four lions which were making ready to spring

upon him. He arose and sought Duanach, who told him of the four warriors sharpening their swords; and in a few moments their heads lay upon the green grass near the sharpening-stone.

Then Conall went to the king's palace, and word was sent to bring out against him the bravest in the land. So there came forward a champion to fight him, but he was powerless against the sword of the stranger. And when the king of Lochlann saw that no man or company of men could stand up against Conall, he made peace with him, and the two swore to be true friends for ever. Then the king asked Conall to dine with him. And they sat down to a banquet with music; and after the banquet there was more music, as well as dancing and merriment of every kind.

✓ V.—*The Stranger at the Feast.*

Now as the two princes sat at the banquet there came into the hall a tall, dark man, who fell upon the king's servants, and in a few moments had bound and gagged them all. The king was so much taken by surprise that in the twinkling of an eye he also was bound, gagged, and laid under his own table. But by this time Conall was ready. With a powerful spring he

leapt upon the stranger, and laid him upon his back. Then he placed his knee on the chest of the fallen man.

"Has death ever come so near you as now?" he asked.

"Nearer," said the stranger.

Conall pressed harder. "Has death come so near to you as that?"

"No," cried the man. "Let me rise, and I will tell you the tale of how death came nearest to me."

Conall did as he wished. The fetters of the king and his servants were loosed, and all the guests sat down once more to the table. But for safety Conall sat near the stranger while they all listened to his tale. "I am the king of Spain," said he, "and I came to this country for no other purpose than to seek and wed the Princess Anna."

"Oho," said Conall to himself; and during the rest of the story he paid no more heed to the meat and drink upon the table.

"One day," said the stranger, "I met a man with a fair maiden laid across his shoulder, and his name was Mac-a-Moir; and when I stood in his way he fell upon me, and bound me, and set me on his horse before him, and took me to the top of a high rock, meaning to throw me

down from it. And he did throw me down, but I stopped half-way—in the nest of an eagle!

"I saw a cave behind the nest, and I crept into it. Then the eagle came home with meat, and I waited till she had gone again before I crept out to share a meal with the eaglets in the nest. But after a few days the eaglets died, and the mother bird seemed to guess that some one had been sharing their food.

"So she looked round about until she found me. Then, raising me in her talons, she flew with me over land and sea. So high did she soar that we seemed to draw near to the sun, on which she gazed with a fearless eye. At last she dropped down, down, down, and laid me upon the shore of an island in the sea.

"The eagle now rested in sleep, for she was plainly weary with her journey; and when I saw my chance, I cut off her head with my sword, which in spite of my far travelling still hung at my side. Then I made myself a boat and came to this land and this castle, and being hungry I made bold to get myself a meal."

Then looking at Conall, the man said, "Now tell me *your* story."

Conall did so; and when his story was ended, he said to the stranger, "You must go with me in search of the Princess Anna."



"I cannot meet that man any more," said the Spanish king, who had no real taste for adventure.

"Then you shall find death here," was the answer.

"I will go," said the stranger.

"So will I," said the king of Lochlann.

"And I," said the little old man Duanach—

"I will be the guide."

Then they found a ship and sailed away to the land where Mac-a-Moir was living with the

princess, and waiting without much patience for the end of a year and a day.

Duanach sought him out, and cried, "Send out champions to fight for you, O Son of the Mighty!"

"That I will," was the ready answer.

Then the little old man asked for a word with the Princess Anna; and when he came into her room he told her that Conall was outside waiting to meet her guardian, and to take her away with him. Right glad was the princess at the news, for she was weary with waiting.

Next day Conall came before the castle, and rang his sword sharply upon his shield. "Yield, or do battle upon the field!" cried he.

"There is no yielding here," said Mac-a-Moir.

"How many champions do you want?"

"As many as you can send," cried Conall.

Then, while the champions were arming, the king of Lochlann and the king of Spain came and stood by the side of Conall. And Mac-a-Moir sent out his three best men to meet the three heroes. But it was not long before the former lay full length upon the field.

During the next five days many other champions met the same fate. But on the sixth day the king of Lochlann and the king of Spain



were made prisoners, and cast into a den of lions behind the castle. By this time the Princess Anna began to be very sorrowful that so much blood was being shed for her sake. Then word was brought to Conall of her sorrow, and he made up his mind to put an end to the fighting in one last combat.

VI.—The Reward of the Brave.

Mac-a-Moir had a bell on the top of his house, and he was a brave and hardy man who could strike a blow upon that bell. And if a blow should be struck upon it, and Mac-a-Moir did not at once come out, it was a sign that there was no more fight left in him.

Now when the Son of the Mighty was eating his breakfast, Conall climbed up to the roof of the house, and struck a blow on the bell. And so strong was the blow that the tongue of the bell fell down through the roof and upon the table where Mac-a-Moir sat at his meal.

At once he went out ready for fight. Conall rang his sword on his shield, and cried, "Yield, or do battle on the field."

"There is no yielding here," was the answer; and this was a sign for the combat to begin.

They drew their slender gray swords, and kindled a fire of sparks which glinted fiercely

till the setting of the sun. Then Duanach cried out, "Throw away your swords, and try it another way."

So they threw away their blades and wrestled, until Conall threw his man upon the earth. "Reach hither my sword," he cried to his servant, "and I will settle him once for all."

"I will not reach it," cried Duanach. "Take a pledge of him that he will be faithful to you."

Then Conall made him promise to be his faithful friend while his life lasted, and Mac-a-Moir rose to his feet. The two heroes clasped hands and stood silent for a few moments.

Then Conall went to Mac-a-Moir's castle and set free the king of Lochlann and the king of Spain from the den of lions, for because they were of royal blood the royal beasts had not hurt them. The next thing Conall did was to set free also the Princess Anna, for whose sake he had done such brave deeds and seen so many adventures. Then Mac-a-Moir, true to his word, asked them all to come into his castle to a feast. And while they were there Conall was wedded to the Princess Anna. The wedding feast lasted for six days, and the last day was as merry as the first.

In due time the king of Erin came home, and there was joy and peace in the realm until his

death, when Prince Conall and his wife, the Princess Anna, became king and queen in their turn. ✓



ROLAND AND OLIVER.

I.—Roland and the Orc.

Long ages ago there lived on the other side of the North Sea a king who was known as Charles the Great. He had as his bodyguard a number of the bravest warriors who have ever lived; and of these the two most renowned were Roland and Oliver, who were always counted equals in valour.

Many stories have been told of their brave deeds. Once upon a time, it was said, Roland was seeking adventures, when he came by chance

to an island kingdom which was plunged in the depths of woe. For a great sea serpent, known as the Orc, had visited the island, and was only prevented from laying waste the whole of it by the offer of some of the fairest maidens of the kingdom as his prey.

At the time of Roland's visit one of these maidens was chained to a rock out in the sea, waiting until it was the pleasure of the monster to devour her. When the hero heard of her sad plight he made ready to go to her rescue.

"Get out the stoutest cable that you have on board," he said to the captain of his ship, "and fasten it to the largest of the anchors. Place them in the small boat, and lower it over the side." This was done at once, and Roland stepped into the boat, taking with him his sword as his only weapon.

After hard rowing, he drew near to the rock to which he had been told the maiden was chained; and when he was about a stone's-throw from it he thought he heard a feeble shout. Turning his eyes to the left, he saw the poor prisoner standing with drooping head near the edge of the water.

Thereupon he gripped his oars and pulled with vigour towards the shore of the islet. But as he drew near he heard a mighty roar

which seemed to shake the heavens ; and in a moment he saw the great monster not far away upon the surface of the water, which was lashed into fury by the angry movements of its tail.

Roland was by no means daunted, and with a quick movement he placed his boat between the sea serpent and its prey. Then he stood up, laid his sword in the bottom of his boat, and took in his strong hands the anchor to which the cable was fastened.

As soon as the serpent caught sight of him it moved across the surface of the water towards his boat, opening its great mouth to take boat and man at one bite. As soon as it drew near enough, Roland raised the anchor and plunged it through the monster's tongue and into the under jaw.

The great beast could now no longer close its mouth without hurting itself. Then Roland, taking an oar from his boat, leapt boldly with it into the serpent's great mouth, and fixed it firmly upright between the upper and the lower jaw. Now he had the monster at his mercy.

His next care was to tow the beast to land. Taking in his hand one end of the cable which was fastened to the anchor, he swam towards the shore, dragging the great serpent after him. But now the sea all around grew red with the



He saw the poor prisoner.

dragon's blood, and after lashing the water with its tail in a fury of anger the monster died without ever a roar of pain.

So Roland saved the maiden, and freed the island kingdom from the plague which had troubled it so sorely.

II.—The False Envoys.

Roland was almost a giant in stature and in strength. He carried a horn, one blast of which was enough to strike terror into the hearts of an army of the bravest warriors. His sword, named Durendal, had been forged by fairy smiths; his spear was so heavy that none but himself could wield it.

We cannot tell of all the wondrous deeds done by himself and his brave companions. But we shall tell of the last great fight, in which he won undying fame and death.

King Charles at one time went at the head of a large army into the rocky land of Spain, there to do battle with the Arabs from Africa who were wasting the land and oppressing the people. As he drew near to a strong city held by the enemy, the Arab leader called together his chief men to a council of war.

Then one of the leaders stood up and said, "It is vain to fight with the army of the great



emperor. Let us send messengers to bow the knee before him, as a sign that we take him as our lord and master. Then when he has left the land with all his warriors we shall be free to do as we please."

It was agreed to follow this counsel, and ten of the captains were chosen to go as messengers to the great emperor. They were clothed in the richest of garments, and rode, instead of chargers, the milk-white mules which in times of high festival were used to draw the coach of their leader. And as a sign of peace each man carried an olive branch in his hand instead of a sword or spear.

After a journey of a few miles the messengers came to the place where the army of the emperor was encamped. Having made known the purpose of their visit to the guards, they were taken at once before the emperor. His throne of gold stood beneath the spreading branches of a lofty tree; and when the messengers raised their eyes to his noble face they felt almost ashamed to deliver their lying message.

The emperor spoke to them kindly, thinking that their downcast looks were due to awe of his presence, and they told him what was the purpose of their leader. Charles then sent them away in peace, with a promise to consider

the matter and give them his decision on the next day.

As soon as the sun had risen on the following morning Charles sent a herald to the tents of the leaders of his host to summon them to a council of war. Roland was among the fore-



The envoys were taken before the emperor.

most to obey the call. Oliver followed closely behind him. Then came Turpin, the warrior priest, and Ganelon, who was the stepfather of Roland. The others followed quickly, and soon the council was complete.

"I doubt the truth and honesty of the leader who has sent these envoys to us," said the emperor. "His promises are fair enough, but who knows what are the secret designs which lie hidden beneath them?"

"I am for war," said Roland. "The promises of the foe have more than once been broken. Let us not trust them again, to our loss."

"Nay," said Ganelon, "sir knight, you are rash. My counsel is to take the leader of our foes at his word." And so well did Ganelon speak that at last the doubts of the emperor were overcome. Then he named Ganelon as his envoy to return with the ten messengers bearing his answer to their request for peace.

Soon they were on their way to the Arab leader, and as they rode along Ganelon talked freely with the messengers. Now one of them had guessed that Ganelon was very jealous of the fame of Roland, and that if the knight were to see his chance to do harm to the hero he would not fail to take it. So this man set to work to persuade Ganelon to betray his master the emperor; and his work was not so hard as it ought to have been.

Before long they reached the city in which the Arab leader was staying, and Ganelon delivered his message. Then he basely told

8 line
the enemies of his lord and master how they could surprise the army in which he served. Soon, he said, the forces of the emperor would be on their way back through the mountain lands in the north of Spain. While they were marching, let the Arabs set upon the rearguard, and an easy victory would be theirs. He also promised to see that Roland was with the last of the returning columns; for if the boastful warrior should fall in the fight, he, Ganelon, would be all the better pleased.

So he spoke, allowing his feelings of hatred and envy to overcome his faith and duty to the emperor and his comrades.

III.—*The Retreat.*

✓ The Arab leader then gave up, to Ganelon the keys of the city, gates as an outward sign of surrender to the emperor; and the false-hearted traitor, after further explaining how the foes of his master ought to act, set out on his return journey. When he came into the presence of the emperor he was warmly thanked for his services, and soon the great camp was broken up. ✓

The trumpets sent forth a merry peal, for the word had been given for home; and before long the great host was on the march to the north-

ward, every man glad at heart that the war in the rugged land of Spain was over at last.

Before the march was begun the emperor called together the leaders and gave to each his post. The post of honour was the command of the rearguard; and when the warriors were asked who should have it, Ganelon, as if in kindness, named Roland as the fittest to take it. So it was arranged, and the brave hero bowed low before his master and his peers in thanks for the honour they had paid him.

Then he called his squire and armed himself. Mounting his fiery charger, he rode out into the camp; and on a little mound in the centre of a field he hoisted his banner as an invitation to the bravest of the army to join him in his task.

At once the bravest flocked to his side, and it was not easy to choose the number required. The hero was also joined by his true comrade Oliver, and by Turpin, the brave priest. Before long the advance guard of the army was on its way, and soon the other companies followed, Roland and his friends riding in the rear and keeping a strict watch in case of surprise.

For a while all went well. Then all at once Oliver halted his horse, and said, "I hear in the distance the sound of many men." Then turn-



Roland hoisted his banner.

ing to Roland, he said, "Our battles are not yet over, my comrade. For, unless I am mistaken, the foe is following hard upon us."

"That is well," said the brave Roland blithely; "for we are tried men, who are ready to win or to die. And in the halls of kings and nobles the minstrels will hereafter sing of the stout fight we shall make this day."

Then he rode with Oliver to a projecting rock, and looking backward, they beheld in the plain below a great army of Arabs advancing. And the practised eyes of the two brave leaders saw at once that the foe was advancing in such a way that they would soon be cut off from the main body of the army. Roland smiled as he watched them.

"Your horn, brother," said Oliver. "Wind it freely, and the emperor will send back a column to our help—maybe he will return himself with all his force."

"Nay," said Roland, with something of scorn in his voice. "We shall win the greater renown if we take the contest upon ourselves."

Oliver was not only brave, but cautious. He saw clearly that to follow such a course was to invite death and destruction. "Sound the horn, comrade," he cried. "There will be no lack of means to win honour."

"Nay," said Roland, "that I will not, for to do so would be to bring disgrace upon my name. The host is great and we are few in numbers, but what of that? The fewer we are, the greater will be the glory for each of us. Let us play our part with honour." And with this Oliver was forced to be content. He at once joined the rest of the band, and found the brave Turpin also longing for the fight.

"It was the emperor himself," said he, "who gave us this sacred charge. We can at least venture our lives cheerfully in his service."

IV.—A Fight against Odds.

Before long the rearguard was cut off from the main body of the army, and Roland led his men down into the plain to face the foe. It was clear from the way in which they were surrounded that some one had made known their plans to the enemy. But for this the hero did not greatly care.

Raising his eyes, he saw ride out from the front rank of the foe a single horseman richly armed, and waving on high a mighty battle-axe. "Ho!" cried the champion, "ye warriors of the great emperor, which of you will dare to fight with me?"

In a moment Roland put spurs to his horse



and rode at full speed to meet the boaster, lance in hand. The two met with a thunderous shock, but Roland drove his spear through his foeman's heart, and the would-be champion fell dead to the earth. "To my side!" cried Roland, turning in his saddle, but without checking his horse. With a rush his warriors followed him, and soon the two forces were engaged in a stern fight.

Over and over again the Arabs, in spite of their numbers, were forced to give way. Roland, Oliver, and Turpin sought out the press of the fight, and mighty were the deeds of valour which they did that day. But in time the weight of numbers began to tell. Roland lost man after man, until his force was reduced to the number of sixty, while his enemy still counted his fighting men by thousands. The strength of the hero, too, was failing, and at last he made up his mind to call his master the emperor to his help.

Raising his horn to his lips he blew a loud blast, the sound of which echoed and re-echoed among the hills. The emperor was now some thirty miles away, but he heard the sound of that familiar horn; and he gave the word for his men to face about, and retrace their steps once more. Soon the great army was on the

way back again through the mountains to the help of the brave Roland, who, as the emperor knew, must be in great distress.

Meanwhile Roland and his little band of warriors were playing their part as best they might. At last the Arab chieftain rode out to meet his brave foe, and Roland faced him, proud of the honour of dealing with him alone. The shining blade of Durendal flashed in the light, and the right hand of the Arab leader fell with his sword to the earth. With a cry of pain he rode back to the ranks of his own men.

Then he gave orders to send forward a strong body of black soldiers who fought in his army and were famous for their fierceness and cruelty. Roland had now less than fifty in his little band, and many of these were wounded, among them his comrade the brave and faithful Oliver, who was mortally hurt.

Roland sought him out, and a mist of sorrow fell upon his eyes as he looked upon the beloved face. "Alas, my brother," he said gently, "when shall I find another like to thee?" The agony of Oliver's wound was more than he could bear. The madness of pain came upon him, and without knowing what he was doing, he raised his sword on high and brought it down with mighty force upon the head of his comrade.

The blow did not harm Roland, for his head was protected by his helmet. Gently he put aside the arm of his comrade, and spoke to him in the tone of a tender nurse at the bedside of the sick. "Brother, you raise your sword against Roland—Roland, your comrade and constant friend." The face of the other grew



pale with the paleness of death. He slipped from his seat and lay at full length upon the ground.

Then with his dying breath he cried aloud, "God's blessing on my king, my country, and upon thee, Roland, my brother." So his brave spirit passed away, and now all his wars were over.

V.—Victorious in Death.

But the band of negro soldiers was closing round him, and Roland turned to face them. Before long he was left with Turpin and one other knight to do battle with the whole force of the enemy. Raising his horn to his lips he blew another blast, and this time heard an answering sound—the trumpets of the emperor now on his way down the rocky path. The Arabs, too, heard that sound, and fear seized upon their hearts.

They had, however, made up their minds to finish their work, and a band of the bravest rode forward to surround the three survivors. But so great was the fury of Roland that he put them all to flight. Then looking behind him, he saw that Turpin was in deep distress. He had fallen on his face not far away, and as he caught sight of him Roland felt his horse stagger and fall. Freeing himself from the stirrups, he ran to the help of his friend, turned him over, and quickly loosed the helmet from his brow. One glance at the priest's pale face showed that his end was nigh.

"Bless me, my father!" cried Roland, and the dying priest raised his hands in blessing. Roland moved away to see whether any other

of his comrades still breathed, and as he went he staggered and fell. Seeing this, the brave Turpin rose slowly to his feet, meaning to bring water from the stream close by to his beloved captain. But before he had taken a few steps he fell to the ground, and his eyes closed in death.

After a time Roland came to himself, and, rising, sought out his sword and his horn. Then with failing steps he set his face towards the steep mountain path, down which he had hoped long before this time to see the warriors of Charles come pouring to his help.

Weak as he was, he found himself unable to take more than a few steps forward, and once again he lay prone upon the earth. Not far away lay what seemed to be the dead body of an Arab. But when Roland sank down the man rose to his feet and came to take away the sword of the brave captain. He laid his hand upon the golden hilt, and as he did so was struck dead upon the earth under a blow from the metal-rimmed horn of the dying warrior.

Once again Roland rose to his feet, and taking his sword in his right hand struck it again and again upon a rock. He knew well that never more would he use it in battle or tournament, and he was unwilling that it should pass

into other hands. But for all his strength he could not break the blade, so well tempered was the steel. So he laid Durendal under the rock, with his horn beside it, and covered them over with earth.

His strength was now completely spent. Sinking down upon his knees, he prayed, "Grant, O Lord, to thy servant pardon for all his sins. Bless my lord the king, my sweet country, and all those who are dear to me." Then his breath failed, and his spirit passed away.



Next day the vanguard of the emperor's host came down the rocky mountain into the plain of the dead, and Charles himself was among the foremost. When he saw what had happened, he stayed not to bury the fallen warriors, but pushed forward with all speed, and soon came up with the remnant of the army against which Roland had fought so well; and the punishment of the traitors was sharp and stern.

Then the emperor led back his army through the mountains, taking with him the bodies of the fallen heroes. In due time Charles reached his capital, and a crowd of gallant knights and fair ladies came forth to meet him.

Now there was one maiden, the Lady Alde, the fairest of the fair, who went at once to meet

the king. And standing near his charger she raised a pale and anxious face. "Why comes not Roland with the king?" she asked. "Have you news of him who swore to take me for his bride? Oh, restore him to me!"

The tears stood in the eyes of the monarch, and for a moment he could find no reply. Then he spoke softly, as a tender father speaks to a little child. "Maiden, thou askest of me what I cannot give, for he who was to make thee a happy bride lies low in death.

"Far away in the rocky land of Spain he fought for his king, and won both fame and the death of a hero in battle with the heathen horde. Yet grieve not too much. My own son is here, ready and willing to make thee a happy wife and a queen."

"God forbid that I should live," she cried, wringing her hands in deep despair, "when Roland lies on the couch of death." Then without another word she sank to the ground; and when they ran to raise her they found that her spirit too had fled.

So the evil work of the traitor Ganelon was complete. Of the punishment that befell him when his treachery was made known to the king it would be too terrible to tell.



"Why comes not Roland with the king?"

Part II.—TALES IN VERSE.

KING WENCESLAS.

Good King Wenceslas looked out,
On the Feast of Stephen,
Where the snow lay round about
Deep, and crisp, and even.
Brightly shone the moon that night,
Though the frost was cruel,
When a poor man came in sight,
Gathering winter fuel.

"Hither, page, and stand by me,
If thou know'st it, telling:
Yonder peasant, who is he?
Where and what his dwelling?"
"Sire, he lives a good league hence
Underneath the mountain,
Right against the forest fence
By Saint Agnes' fountain."

"Bring me flesh and bring me wine,
Bring me pine-logs hither:
Thou and I will see him dine
When we bear them thither."
Page and monarch forth they went,
Forth they went together,
Through the rude wind's wild lament
And the bitter weather.



"Sire, the night is darker now,
And the wind blows stronger:
Fails my heart, I know not how,
I can go no longer."
"Mark my footsteps, my good page,
Tread thou in them boldly;
Thou shalt find the winter wind
Freeze thy blood less coldly."

In his master's steps he trod,
Where the snow lay dinted;
Heat was in the very sod
Which the saint had printed.

Therefore, Christian men, be sure,
Wealth or rank possessing,
Ye who now will bless the poor
Shall yourselves find blessing.

Old Carol.

KING LEAR AND HIS THREE DAUGHTERS.

KING LEAR once ruled in this land
With princely power and peace ;
And had all things with heart's content,
That might his joys increase.
Amongst those things that Nature gave,
Three daughters fair had he,
So princely seeming, beautiful,
As fairer could not be.

So on a time it pleased the king
A question thus to move,
Which of his daughters to his grace
Could show the dearest love :
"For to my age you bring content,"
Quoth he, "then let me hear
Which of you three in plighted troth
The kindest will appear."

To whom the eldest thus began :
"Dear father mine," quoth she,
"Before your face to do you good,
My blood shall rendered be :

And for your sake my bleeding heart
Shall here be cut in twain,
Ere that I see your reverend age
The smallest grief sustain."

"And so will I," the second said;
"Dear father, for your sake,
The worst of all extremities
I'll gently undertake:
And serve your highness night and day
With diligence and love;
That sweet content and quietness
Discomforts may remove."

"In doing so, you glad my soul,"
The aged king replied;
"What say'st thou, my youngest girl,
How is thy love ally'd?"
"*My love,*" quoth young Cordelia then,
"*Which to your grace I owe,*
Shall be the duty of a child,
And that is all I'll show."

"And wilt thou show no more," quoth he,
"Than doth thy duty bind?
I well perceive thy love is small,
When as no more I find.
Henceforth I banish thee my court,
Thou art no child of mine;
Nor any part of this my realm
By favour shall be thine.

"Thy elder sisters' loves are more
Than I can well demand,
On whom I equally bestow
My kingdom and my land,
My royal state and all my goods,
That lovingly I may
With those thy sisters be maintained
Until my dying day."

Thus flattering speeches won renown
By these two sisters here ;
The third had causeless banishment,
Yet was her love more dear :
For poor Cordelia patiently
Went wand'ring up and down,
Unhelped, unpitied, gentle maid,
Through many an English town.

Until at last in famous France
She gentler fortunes found ;
Though poor and meek, yet she was deemed
The fairest on the ground :
Where, when the king her virtues heard,
And had this lady seen,
With full consent of all his court,
He made his wife and queen.

Her father, old King Lear, this while
With his two daughters stayed :
Forgetful of their promised loves,
Full soon the same decayed ;



For living in Queen Regan's court,
The elder of the twain,
She took from him his chiefest means,
And most of all his train.

For whereas twenty men were wont
To wait with bended knee,
She gave allowance but to ten,
And after scarce to three ;
Nay, one she thought too much for him ;
So took she all away,
In hope that in her court, good king,
He would no longer stay.

"Am I rewarded thus," quoth he,
"In giving all I have
Unto my children, and to beg
For what I lately gave ?
I'll go unto my Gonorell :
My second child, I know,
Will be more kind and pitiful,
And will remove my woe."

Full fast he hies then to her court ;
Who, when she heard his moan,
Returned him answer, that she grieved
That all his means were gone ;
But no way could relieve his wants ;
Yet, if that he would stay
Within her kitchen, he should have
What scullions gave away.

When he had heard with bitter tears,
He made his answer then :
"In what I did, let me be made
Example to all men.
I will return again," quoth he,
"Unto my Regan's court ;
She will not use me thus, I hope,
But in a kinder sort."



Where when he came she gave command,
To drive him thence away :
When he was well within her court
(She said) he would not stay.
Then back again to Gonorell
The woeful king did hie,
That in her kitchen he might have
What scullion boys set by.

But there of that he was denied,
Which she hath promised late ;
For once refusing, he should not
Come after to her gate.
Thus 'twixt his daughters for relief
He wandered up and down ;
Being glad to feed on beggar's food,
That lately wore a crown.

And calling to remembrance then
His youngest daughter's words,
That said the duty of a child
Was all that love affords ;

But doubting to repair to her
Whom he had banished so,
Grew frantic mad ; for in his mind
He bore the wounds of woe :

Which made him rend his milk-white locks
And tresses from his head,
And all with blood bestain his cheeks,
With age and honour spread.
To hills and woods and watery founts
He made his hourly moan,
Till hills and woods and senseless things
Did seem to sigh and groan.

Even thus possessed with discontents,
He passèd o'er to France,
In hopes from fair Cordelia there
To find some gentler chance ;
Most virtuous dame ! who when she heard
Of this her father's grief,
As duty bound she quickly sent
Him comfort and relief :

And by a train of noble peers,
In brave and gallant sort,
She gave in charge he should be brought
Unto her husband's court ;
This royal king with noble mind
So freely gave consent
To muster up his knights at arms,
To fame and courage bent.

And so to England came with speed,
To repossess King Lear
And drive his daughters from their thrones
By his Cordelia dear.
Where she, true-hearted, noble queen,
Was in the battle slain ;
Yet he, good king, in his old days,
Possessed his crown again.

But when he heard Cordelia's death,
Who died indeed for love
Of her dear father, in whose cause
She did this battle move,
He swooning fell upon her breast,
From whence he never parted :
But on her bosom left his life,
That was so truly hearted.

Old Ballad.



ROBIN HOOD AND ALLEN-A-DALE.

As Robin Hood in the forest stood,
All under the greenwood tree,
There was he aware of a fine young man,
As fine as fine could be.

The youngster was clothed in scarlet red,
In scarlet fine and gay,
And he did frisk it over the plain,
And chanted a roundelay.

As Robin Hood next morning stood
Amongst the leaves so gay,
There did he spy the same young man
Come drooping along the way.

The scarlet he wore the day before,
It was clean cast away,
And at every step he heaved a sigh,
Alack! and well-a-day!

Then stepped forth brave Little John
And Midge, the miller's son,
Which made the young man bend his bow,
When that he saw them come.

"Stand off! stand off!" the young man said.
"What is your will with me?"

"You must come before our master straight,
Under yon greenwood tree."

And when he came bold Robin before.
Robin asked him courteously,
"Oh, hast thou any money to spare
For my merry men and me?"

"I have no money," the young man said,
"But five shillings and a ring,
And that I have kept these seven long years
To have at my wedding."

"Yesterday I should have married a maid,
But the same from me was ta'en,
And chosen to be an old man's delight,
Whereby my poor heart is slain."

"What is thy name?" then said Robin Hood;

"Come, tell me, without any fail."

"By the faith of my body," thus said the young man,

"My name is Allen-a-Dale."

"What wilt thou give me," said Robin Hood,

"In ready gold, as fee,

To help thee to thy true love again,

And deliver her up to thee?"

"I have no money," then quoth the young man,

"No ready gold as fee,

But I will swear upon a book

Thy true servant to be."

Then Robin he hasted over the plain,

He would neither rest nor sleep,

Until he came unto the church

Where Allen his wedding should keep.

With that there came in a wealthy knight,

Who was both grave and old,

And after him a bonny maid

Did shine like glittering gold.

"This is not a fit match," quoth Robin Hood,

"That you do seem to make here;

For since we are come unto the church,

The bride shall choose her own dear."

Then Robin Hood put his horn to his mouth

And blew out blasts two or three;

Then four-and-twenty bowmen bold

Came leaping o'er the lea.



"This is not a fit match," quoth Robin Hood.

And when they came into the churchyard,
Marching all in a row,
The first man was Allen-a-Dale
To give bold Robin his bow.

"This is thy true love," Robin he said,
"Young Allen, as I hear say ;
And you shall be married at the same time,
Before we depart away."

In such wise then ended this merry wedding,
The bride she looked like a queen ;
And so they returned to the merry greenwood,
Amongst the leaves so green.

Old Ballad.

KATHLEEN.

O NORAH, lay your basket down
And rest your weary hand,
And come and hear me sing a song
Of our old Ireland.

There was a lord of Galloway,
A mighty lord was he ;
And he did wed a second wife,
A maid of low degree.

But he was old, and she was young,
And so, in evil spite,
She baked the black bread for his kin,
And fed her own with white.

She whipped the maids and starved the kern,
And drove away the poor ;
" Ah, woe is me ! " the old lord said ;
" I rue my bargain sore ! "

This lord he had a daughter fair,
Beloved of old and young,
And nightly round the shealing-fires
Of her the gleeman sung.
" As sweet and good is young Kathleen
As Eve before her Fall ; "
So sang the harper at the fair,
So harped he in the hall.

" Oh, come to me, my daughter dear !
Come sit upon my knee :
For looking in your face, Kathleen,
Your mother's own I see ! "
He smoothed and smoothed her hair away,
He kissed her forehead fair ;
It is my darling Mary's brow,
It is my darling's hair ! "

Oh, then spake up the angry dame
" Get up, get up, " quoth she ;
" I'll sell ye over Ireland,
I'll sell ye o'er the sea ! "

She clipped her glossy hair away,
That none her rank might know ;
She took away her gown of silk,
And gave her one of tow ;



And sent her down to Limerick town.
And to a seaman sold
This daughter of an Irish lord
For ten good pounds in gold.

The lord he smote upon his breast,
And tore his beard so gray;
But he was old, and she was young,
And so she had her way.

Sure, that same night the Banshee howled
To fright the evil dame,
And fairy folks, who loved Kathleen,
With funeral torches came.

She watched them glancing through the trees,
And glimmering down the hill;
They crept before the dead-vault door,
And there they all stood still!

"Get up, old man! the wake-lights shine!"
"Ye wicked witch," quoth he,
"So I'm rid of your tongue, I little care
If they shine for you or me.

"Oh, whoso brings my daughter back,
My gold and land shall have!"
Oh, then spake up his handsome page:
"No gold nor land I crave!

"But give to me your daughter dear,
Give sweet Kathleen to me;
Be she on sea or be she on land,
I'll bring her back to thee."

"My daughter is a lady born,
And you of low degree;
But she shall be your bride the day
You bring her back to me."

He sailed east, he sailed west,
And far and long sailed he,
Until he came to Boston town,
Across the great salt sea.

"Oh, have ye seen the young Kathleen,
The flower of Ireland?
Ye'll know her by her eyes so blue,
And by her snow-white hand!"

Out spake an ancient man: "I know
The maiden whom ye mean;
I bought her of a Limerick man,
And she is called Kathleen."

"No skill hath she in household work,
Her hands are soft and white,
Yet well by loving looks and ways
She doth her cost requite."



So up they walked through Boston town,
And met a maiden fair,
A little basket on her arm
So snowy-white and bare.

"Come hither, child, and say hast thou
This young man ever seen?"
They wept within each other's arms,
The page and young Kathleen.

"Oh, give to me this darling child,
And take my purse of gold."

"Nay, not by me," her master said,
"Shall sweet Kathleen be sold.

"We loved her in the place of one
The Lord hath early ta'en;
But since her heart's in Ireland,
We give her back again!"

Sure, now they dwell in Ireland;
As you go up Claremore,
Ye'll see their castle looking down
The pleasant Galway shore.

And the old lord's wife is dead and gone,
And a happy man is he,
For he sits beside his own Kathleen,
With her darling on his knee.

JOHN G. WHITTIER.

THE SINGING LEAVES.

I.

✓
"WHAT fairings will ye that I bring?"
Said the king to his daughters three;
"For I to Vanity Fair am boun,
Now say what shall they be?"

Then up and spake the eldest daughter,
That lady tall and grand:
"Oh, bring me pearls and diamonds great,
And gold rings for my hand."

Thereafter spake the second daughter,
That was both white and red:
"For me bring silks that will stand alone,
And a gold comb for my head."

Then came the turn of the least daughter,
That was whiter than thistledown,
And among the gold of her blithesome hair
Dim shone the golden crown.

"There came a bird this morning
And sang 'neath my bower eaves,
Till I dreamed, as his music made me,
'Ask thou for the Singing Leaves.'"

Then the brow of the king swelled crimson
With a flush of angry scorn:
"Well have ye spoken, my two eldest,
And chosen as ye were born;



"But she, like a thing of peasant race,
That is happy binding the sheaves ;"
Then he saw her dead mother in her face,
And said, "Thou shalt have thy leaves."

II.

He mounted and rode three days and nights
Till he came to Vanity Fair,
And 'twas easy to buy the gems and the silk,
But no Singing Leaves were there.

Then deep in the greenwood rode he,
And asked of every tree,
"Oh, if you have ever a Singing Leaf,
I pray you give it me!"

But the trees all kept their counsel,
And never a word said they,
Only there sighed from the pine-tops
A music of seas far away.

Only the pattering aspen
Made a sound of growing rain,
That fell ever faster and faster,
Then faltered to silence again.

"Oh, where shall I find a little foot-page
That would win both hose and shoon,
And will bring to me the Singing Leaves
If they grow under the moon?"



*She took the packet, and the smile
Deepened down beneath the tear.*

(See page 196.)

Then lightly turned him Walter the page,
By the stirrup as he ran :
" Now pledge you me the truesome word
Of a king and gentleman,
" That you will give me the first, first thing
You meet at your castle gate,
And the Princess shall get the Singing Leaves
Or mine be a traitor's fate."

The king's head dropped upon his breast
A moment, as it might be ;
" Twill be my dog, he thought, and said,
" My faith I plight to thee."

Then Walter took from next his heart
A packet small and thin :
" Now give you this to the Princess Anne,
The Singing Leaves are therein."

III.

As the king rode in at his castle gate
A maiden to meet him ran,
And " Welcome, father ! " she laughed and cried
Together, the Princess Anne.
" Lo, here the Singing Leaves," quoth he,
" And woe, but they cost me dear ! "
She took the packet, and the smile
Deepened down beneath the tear.

It deepened down till it reached her heart,
And then gushed up again,
And lighted her eyes as the sudden sun
Transfigures the summer rain.

And the first Leaf, when it was opened,
Sang: "I am Walter the page,
And the songs I sing 'neath thy window
Are my only heritage."

And the second Leaf sang: "But in the land
That is neither on earth nor sea,
My lute and I are lords of more
Than thrice this kingdom's fee."

And the third Leaf sang, "Be mine! be mine!"
And ever it sang, "Be mine!"
Then sweeter it sang and ever sweeter,
And said, "I am thine, thine, thine!"

At the first Leaf she grew pale enough.
At the second she turned aside,
At the third, 'twas as if a lily flushed
With a rose's red heart's tide.

"Good counsel gave the bird," said she,
"I have my hope thrice o'er,
For they sing to my very heart," she said,
"And it sings to them evermore."

She brought to him her beauty and truth,
But and broad earldoms three,
And he made her queen of the broader lands
He held of his lute in fee.

J. RUSSELL LOWELL.



KATE BARLASS.

I, CATHERINE, am a Douglas born,
A name to all Scots dear ;
And Kate Barlass they've called me now
Through many a waning year.

This old arm's withered now. 'Twas once
Most deft 'mong maidens all
To rein the steed, to wing the shaft,
To smite the palm-play ball.

In hall adown the close-linked dance
It has shone most white and fair ;
It has been the rest for a true lord's head,
And many a sweet babe's nursing-bed.
And the bar to a king's chambere.

Ay, lassies, draw round Kate Barlass,
And hark with bated breath
How good King James,* King Robert's son,
Was foully done to death.

* James I. of Scotland.

'Twas a wild eve in February,
And against the casement pane
The branches smote like summoning hands,
And muttered the driving rain.

And now there came a torchlight glare,
And a clang of arms there came;
And not a soul in that space but thought
Of the foe Sir Robert Græme.

Yea, from the country of the wild Scots,
O'er mountain, valley, and glen,
He had brought with him in murderous league
Three hundred armèd men.

The king knew all in an instant's flash;
And like a king did he stand;
But there was no armour in all the room,
Nor weapon lay to his hand.

And all the women flew to the door,
And thought to have made it fast;
But the bolts were gone, and the bars were gone,
And the locks were riven and brast.

And he caught the pale, pale queen in his arms
As the iron footsteps fell,
Then loosed her, standing alone, and said:
"Our bliss was our farewell!"



And 'twixt his lips he murmured a prayer,
And he crossed his brow and breast;
And proudly in royal hardihood
Even so with folded arms he stood,
The prize of the bloody quest.

Then on me leaped the queen like a deer:
"O Catherine, help!" she cried.
And low at his feet we clasped his knees
Together side by side.
"Oh! even a king for his people's sake
From treasonous death must hide!"

"For *her* sake most!" I cried, and I marked
The pang that my words could wring.
And the iron tongs from the chimney nook
I snatched and held to the king:
"Wrench up the plank, and the vault beneath
Shall yield safe harbouring."

With brows low bent, from my eager hand
The heavy heft did he take;
And the plank at his feet he wrenched and tore;
And as he frowned through the open floor,
Again I said, "For her sake!"

Then he cried to the queen, "God's will be done!"
For her hands were clasped in prayer.
And down he sprang to the inner crypt,
And straight we closed the plank he had ripped
And toiled to smooth it fair.



"For her sake most!" I cried.

Then the queen cried, "Catherine, keep the door!

And I to this will suffice!"

At her word I rose, all dazed, to my feet,

And my heart was fire and ice.

And louder ever the voices grew,

And the tramp of men in mail;

Until to my brain it seemed to be

As though I tossed on a ship at sea

In the teeth of a crashing gale.

Then back I flew to the rest; and hard

We strove with sinews knit

To force the table against the door;

But we might not compass it.

Then my wild gaze sped far down the hall

To the place of the hearthstone sill;

And the queen bent ever above the floor,

For the plank was rising still.

And now the rush was heard on the stair.

And "God! what help?" was our cry

And was I frenzied, or was I bold?

I looked at each empty stanchion-hold,

And no bar but my own had I!

Like iron felt my arm, as through

The staple I made it pass:

Alack! it was flesh and bone—no more!

'Twas Catherine Douglas sprang to the door,

But I fell back, Kate Barlass.

With that they all thronged into the hall,
Half dim to my failing ken;
And the space that was but a void before
Was a crowd of wrathful men.

Behind the door I had fallen and lay,
Yet my sense was wildly aware,
And for all the pain of my shattered arm
I never fainted there.

Even as I fell, my eyes were cast
Where the king leaped down to the pit;
And lo! the plank was smooth in its place,
And the queen stood far from it.

And under the litters and through the bed,
And within the presses all,
The traitor sought for the king, and pierced
The arras around the wall.

And through the chamber they ramped and stormed,
Like lions loose in the lair,
And scarce could trust to their very eyes,
For behold!—no king was there.*

D. G. ROSSETTI.

* The rest of the poem tells how the king was finally murdered in spite of the brave deed of Catherine Douglas.



FAIRY DAYS.

BESIDE the old hall fire,—upon my nurse's knee,
Of happy fairy days—what tales were told to me!
I thought the world was once—all peopled with
princesses,

And my heart would beat to hear—their loves and
their distresses;

And many a quiet night,—in slumber sweet and deep,
The pretty fairy people—would visit me in sleep.

I saw them in my dreams—come flying east and
west,

With wondrous fairy gifts—the new-born babe they
blest;

One has brought a jewel,—and one a crown of gold,
And one has brought a curse,—but she is wrinkled
and old.

The gentle queen turns pale—to hear those words
of sin;

But the king he only laughs,—and bids the dance
begin.

The babe has grown to be—the fairest of the land,
And rides the forest green,—a hawk upon her hand,
An ambling palfrey white,—a golden robe and
crown:

I've seen her in my dreams—riding up and down;
And heard the ogre laugh—as she fell into his snare,
At the little tender creature—who wept and tore her
hair!



But ever when it seemed—her need was at the
sorest,

A prince in shining mail—comes prancing through
the forest,

A waving ostrich plume,—a buckler burnished bright:
I've seen him in my dreams—good sooth! a gallant
knight.

His lips are coral red—beneath a dark moustache;
See how he waves his hand—and how his blue eyes
flash!

“Come forth, thou Paynim knight!”—he shouts in
accents clear.

The giant and the maid—both tremble his voice to
hear.

Saint Mary guard him well!—he draws his falchion
keen,

The giant and the knight—are fighting on the green.
I see them in my dreams,—his blade gives stroke on
stroke,

The giant pants and reels,—and tumbles like an oak!

With what a blushing grace—he falls upon his knee
And takes the lady's hand—and whispers, “You are
free!”

Ah! happy childish tales—of knight and faërie!
I waken from my dreams,—but there's ne'er a knight
for me;

I waken from my dreams,—and wish that I could be
A child by the old hall fire,—upon my nurse's knee!

W. M. THACKERAY.

WOODEN LEGS.



Two children sat in the twilight,
Murmuring soft and low :
Said one, "I'll be a sailor-lad,
With my boat ahoy ! yo ho !
For sailors are most loved of all
In every happy home,
And tears of grief or gladness fall
Just as they go or come."

But the other child said sadly,
"Ah, do not go to sea,
Or in the dreary winter nights
What will become of me ?
For if the wind began to blow,
Or thunder shook the sky,
Whilst you were in your boat, yo ho
What could I do but cry ?"

Then he said, "I'll be a soldier,
With a delightful gun,
And I'll come home with a wooden leg,
As heroes have often done."
She screams at that, and prays and begs,
While tears—half anger—start,
"Don't talk about your wooden legs
Unless you'd break my heart !"

He answered her rather proudly,
"If so, what *can* I be,
If I must not have a wooden leg,
And must not go to sea?
How could the Queen sleep sound at night,
Safe from the scum and dregs,
If English boys refused to fight
In fear of wooden legs?"

She hung her head repenting,
And trying to be good,
But her little hand stroked tenderly
The leg of flesh and blood!
And with her rosy mouth she kissed
The knickerbockered knee,
And sighed, "Perhaps—if you insist—
You'd better go to sea!"

Then he flung his arms about her,
And laughingly he spoke,
"But I've seen many honest tars
With legs of British oak!
O darling! when I am a man,
With beard of shining black,
I'll be a *hero* if I can,
And you must not hold me back."

She kissed him as she answered,
"I'll try what I can do,—
And Wellington had both his legs,
And Cœur de Lion too!"



And Garibaldi," here she sighed,
"I know *he's* lame—but there,
He's *such* a hero—none beside
Like *him* could do and dare!"

So the children talked in the twilight
Of many a setting sun,
And she'd stroke his chin, and clap her hands
That the beard had not begun;
For though she meant to be brave and good,
When he played a hero's part,
Yet often the thought of the leg of wood
Hung heavy on her heart!

"A."

